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Ouroboros Record

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Ouroboros Record

~Circus of Oubeniel~

- Volume 0 -
Prologue

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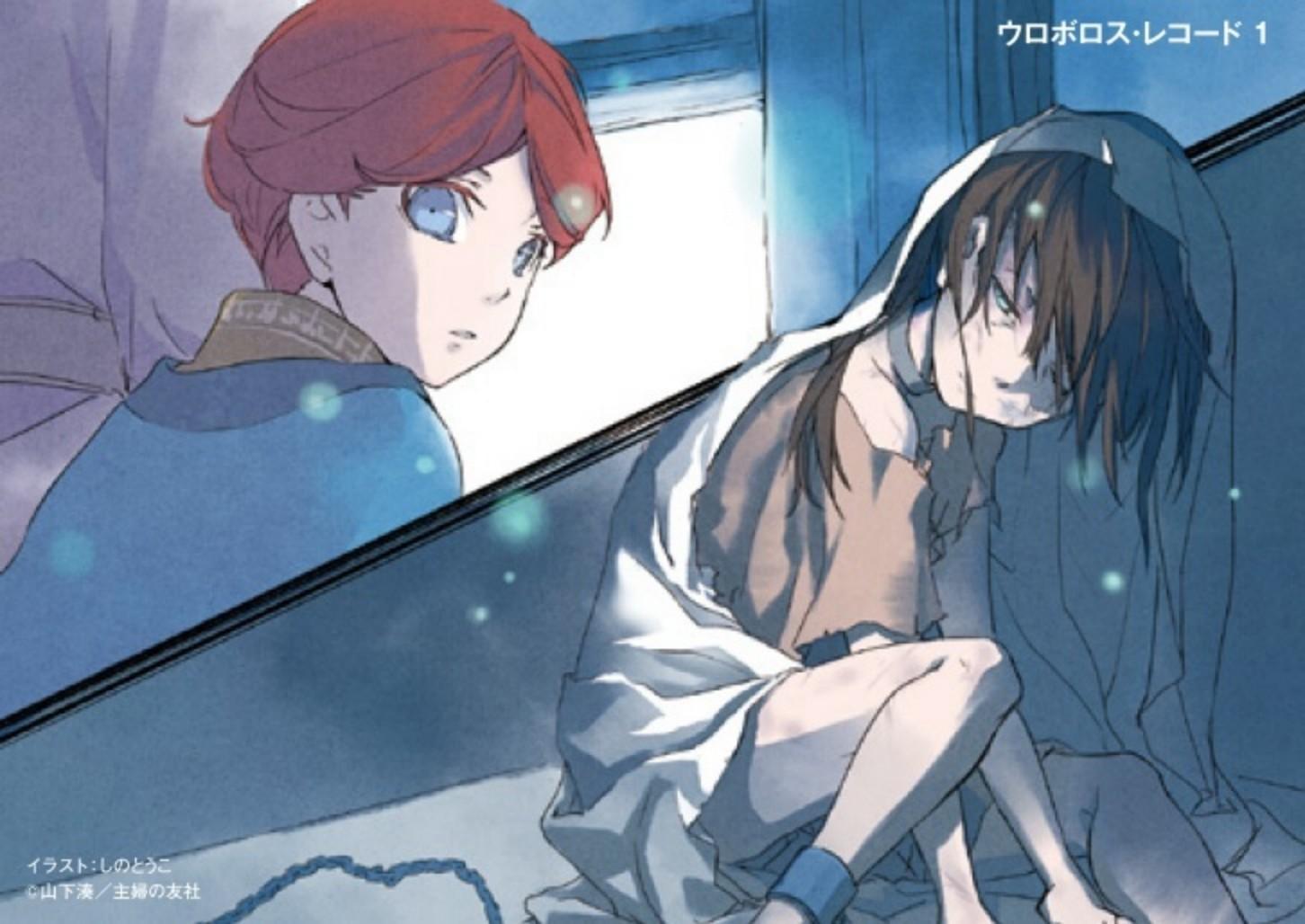
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- STORY -

[This is an everlasting love story.] The second son of the Count family, Tullius Shernan Oubeniel, was a person who reincarnated from modern day Japan. That is, a person who has a single experience of death. With no understanding as to how he was reincarnated, he thought that perhaps, he might be reincarnated next time in the same way. Yet, his fear of death was greater than anything – above that, he could only do things such that he avoids death. Peculiar to this world were certain kinds of magic and one of them was alchemy. Choosing this class of magic, he was said to be able to attain perpetual youth and longevity. With that as his only salvation and goal, he had to reach out his hand towards the deepest secrets of alchemy and did so as though it was the only way for him to live. Even if there were sacrifices to be made for that end.

A slave maid admired him from his youth. A Count family. Adventurer. Slave. Citizen. Aristocrat. Country. Humans. Other beings that were not human..... Just because of one man's delusional obsessions, many lives were changed, warped, torn apart. Even then, Tullius's footsteps never knew pause. Everything was so that he could reach the forever he longed for.

ウロボロス・レコード 1



Chapter 0

Pursuit of Perpetuity

— If darkness was called the lack of light, this was certainly darkness.

A suspending feeling of falling.

Like a ball of wool unwinding, the elements that made him unravelled through the tail of wool.

Memories, language, senses, emotions.

And then everything fell out. What will remain of him afterwards?

— Nothing.

Being conscious of that in a split second, he became terrified, horrified and was unable to endure it.

Even as he frantically tried to piece together his dispersing self, trying to hold it back, they continued to disappear.

No matter how much he struggled, he was unable to prevent his defeat.

I am going to vanish. I am going to die.

— Lies.

It had been likened to sleeping but it was definitely not such a gentle experience.

Parting with your core as though as you were melting, its violence can be compared to being digested inside the stomach of a beast.

There was no such thing as tranquility. It was simply an uneasy feeling of losing your faculties.

And at some point, you would feel emptiness. You don't even feel nothing. You become zero.

— I hate it.

Hate it, hate it, hate it, hate it, hate it!

I hate for this to have ended!

Am I destined to remain in this emptiness, this world where nothing exists?

Are you saying all that I have lived for to this day, was to welcome such an end!?

“...That would be, too much”



I was stirred awake by my own sleep talk.

The view of the place plunged into my eyes, the flickering light from the lamp, a wooden desk, and on top of it, a rat cage, and countless number of medicine. It was an underground laboratory that I was used to seeing.

It seems like I had fallen asleep while in an experiment.

It was a nightmare earlier. A nightmare that I saw many times over, it seems like I have seen it again today.

It could have been because I have seen this so many times that now, I no longer scream and jump off awake. However, the terrible feeling was real.

Getting up from the chair, I could feel the soaking sensation of sweat throughout my body despite it not being warm here. It was always like this after seeing that dream.

— The dream before I was reborn.

— Or the dream after I died.

“Even though I having seen that dream recently... Why am I having this dream now?”

“Chi, Chi, Chi!” Towards my monologue, the caged rats squeaked. It felt like they were mocking me.

...Ahh, that's right. I have decided on the cause.

It was because I have reached the limits of my research.

A research that I absolutely had to do because of that. The research to achieve everlasting youth and longevity.

“...It should have been longer. And yet, only 10 minutes has passed.”

As I said, my hands were raised towards the luminance. Their smallness cannot be compared at all with their original size.

The fingers were small, and the hands that had never stopped growing were without a doubt, the hands of a child.

My own voice that sent vibrations to my eardrums was the high-pitched voice of a child that has not broken his voice.

Even the hair that was entwined into my fingers that were scratching my head, had

the colour red, a copper-like red. It was absolutely not the usual black.

I see.

This was the me that had been reincarnated after experiencing death in my old world.

Talese Shernan Obeniel, who just became eight years old.

— The Cycle of Transmigration.

No matter how I see it, that was the phenomenon that I had underwent.

After dying once, I was reincarnated with my memories and personality intact.

Why was I reborn? To that question, I have a never-ending supply of interest but at present, the reason was unclear. At the very least, there were no similar kinds of people near me and even if such a person existed, it was just myths and fairy-tales which couldn't be distinguished from fiction.

What kind of life did I bid farewell to in my previous lifetime was something that I did not have to say, I believe.

Just like my current life, I was a male and was born in 21st Century Japan. I died young without experiencing any bit of adult life. If that was all I remembered about my previous life, I wonder if it would be particularly problematic.

Anyways, what was important was that I died once and had been reincarnated with some memories retained.

...Yes, I still have memories of my death.

Was it the effect of being shown something by the brain or was it a vision I had after my soul melted away from my flesh? I was forced to taste the sensation of returning to nothing, a taste that can only be described as revolting.

What happened after that and what kind of good fortune passed my way? Somehow I was given a second life.

However, whenever I dreamt about that moment, I would go crazy. No, perhaps I have already gone mad.

After all, I am still seized by this fear of death.

...Humans have to die one day. That has been the unbending providence of the world. Even if I reincarnated like this, one day I would grow old and fall ill, or I might meet with a mishap — under the most brutal circumstances I might be killed but either way, all paths lead to death.

I don't want that.

The reason as to how I reincarnated was not yet known. This means that I have no way of figuring out if I would be reincarnated if I died again.

I have a hunch that I won't be coming back this time. The feeling of dispersing after dying. That and also because my good fortune might not show itself a second time, these were more than sufficient reasons to convince myself.

That's why before I was even ten, I had been conducting this research.

Eh? What kind of research?

"I have repeated this research over and over again so that there are no more failures though..."

I threw out a rat from the cage as I said.

That rat's forefeet was missing on one side. I had cut it off for the sake of the experiment.

Probably remembering it's leg being cut off in its tiny brain, the rat struggled endlessly.

I paid no heed to it, and applied a suitable amount of [Ingredient] on its missing leg.

Next, I sang the [Incantation].

"<<Alchemise>>"

Faint glittery particles gathered on the ingredients and just when it started sparkling, the light that had been collected in that one place took on a different shape.

It was the rat's forefoot. The part which had I had purposely cut off had begun regenerating. By none other than my hands, regeneration had been achieved.

—Alchemy.

A form of magic to turn materials into a higher-value item such as transmuting iron or lead into gold.

To go into extremes, it could also be called a magic that extracts the soul to lift humans into the plane of greater existence.

That was what I, Talese Shernan Obeniel, had been studying. A study to investigate the possibility of evading death.

...I might have forgotten to mention this but in this world where I had reincarnated to, stuff like magic exists.



Alcael Kingdom, Royal capital Brolsenul.

This was not a name that your average Japanese, born in the beginning of the 21st Century, would remember hearing.

In truth, before I came to being in this world, I had not known of this name too.

It was a fortress city that was protected by stone walls that were built in the shape of a circle around the city's outer circumference. The city was divided into two sections

approximately by the Amon River that crawls and flows from the north-east to the south-west. From a bird's eye view, the landscape of the city should appear as what they call an Yin-Yang circle in the Orient.

The mansion of the Obeniel Family, where I resided in, was also in this city.

"Talese. Are you still fooling around with that vulgar business?"

At the head of a long table which could easily seat 10 people in each row, a middle-aged man's voice bellowed. He was my father.

He was wearing a loose gown. Peeking inside the well-tailored clothes was also... ahem, an equally liberal arc was drawn. It was an impressive potbelly. His complexion was good and his physique wasn't that bad so it would have been better if he did more exercises to strengthen his body.

"Please stop saying that, father."

I assumed he would continue with his lecturing and lifted my eyes absentmindedly. The scenery of the mansion's dining room encroached into my sight.

With the break of dawn, the extravagant ornamental chandelier glittered upon being struck by rays of sunlight from the window. That was about the size of it. I inadvertently imagined that if the lamp was lighted up, night would feel as though it was noon. My father, who was the current head of family, was seated and behind him was, a painting was hanged from the wall. The painting was drawn in an enigmatic style and illustrated a scene from two hundred years ago, of the founding head of family who completed a meritorious deed in battle and was being given appointment by the king of that time.

Whether it was the glossy carpet laying on the floor or the expensive-looking vase placed along the wall, the vivid hues and shine from just about everything was hurting my eyes. For me who has yet to fully cut off the connection of being a plebeian in my previous life, I could not get used to this excessively pompous interior design.

It was as though this was a palace for royalty and titled aristocrats but,

"Something as lowly as alchemy, what else could I have called it? It is no good for the child of the Count Obeniel Family to be getting his hands stained in such a crude activity."

Said father curtly.

That's right, the family I was born into in this life was somehow aristocratic. Furthermore, it was a fairly a high position of peerage, at the Count level.

The Obeniel Count Family established itself two hundred years ago but in comparison to this country which holds a history of five hundred years, it was a relatively new family. In any case, the founder of the family was a descendent of a powerful aristocratic family that has gone largely extinct but, earning merit from the war with a neighbouring country, he was returned the peerage of count by the king of that time. Honestly, to what extent is this true bears doubts. For a person of an originally low social status to rise that much in rank, it could have been that, the person in question obtained a pedigree family's ancestry after buying it. After all, it has happened before in the history of my previous world. Tokugawa Ieyasu is a conspicuous example for this. I remember having read from some book that there was a rather ridiculous theory that he was, as a matter of fact, an imposter who bought the name of Ieyasu.

Well, I shall depart from this topic of family lineage. To have been born into the Obeniel Family was to me, extremely lucky. That was because in this world, as can be seen, the aristocrats held considerable powers – a feudalistic hierarchical society. Had I been born the child of a peasant or something of the like, I would not have been able to face the future at all. Let alone studying about immortality, just trying to maintain a daily life would be more than enough to handle. To have been born into affluence was, in combination with my reincarnation, an inconceivable blessing from the heavens.

Living in the capital was also good. Father did not have much zeal in the aspect of managing the territory, and as such, devolves that job to his retainers while giving his all to his social life in the capital. Thanks to that, instead of living in an inconvenient place like the countryside, I could live with little hassle in the city with infrastructure all built up.

The exception to this lifestyle was that the pressing problem of father objections with my alchemy research.

“In any case. Oh Talese, if you had that much talent, hmm, why don’t you stop relying on this narrow-minded skill and work on being a magician like everyone? That way, even as a second son, you would be able to be an imperial magician and create a path to be renowned. Isn’t being an alchemist a vulgar occupation? It is as good as a dubious roadside peddler selling drugs.”

“Yes...”

I gave the default reply which I have always referred to when responding to his incessant nagging.

Just as he has said, alchemy’s place in this world was unfairly low. The reason being

that magic was often made the yardstick for alchemy in this world, and magic was quite a strong thing to compare against. Of course it was possible to summon fire or lightning from staffs. In general, injuries and illnesses can be treated if you request treatment from the priests of churches. Even if you carry around medication made from pounding of mortar and pestle or weapons infused with magic, backwards compatibility of most magic at present was great in that they would be able to easily substitute them.

From the perspective of a modern person like myself, it would be a theory that would make one burst out in laughter. Substitute them? Won't that be awesome? Being able to substitute all sorts of items effectively would conversely mean that it would be able to mass produce. Though, it was rather lacking flexibility given that magic was an innate talent limited to few users.

That being said, to most people, their reply to people who use alchemy and the like, to create things as a job, would be that magic was more than enough for them.

...What are they saying? The cost would inevitably go down with mass production and considering that the entrance space for magic is so narrow, the number of people who are able to receive the blessings of magic would number few. Furthermore, recovery magic for medical treatment is oligopolised by the fellas at church and so, no matter how much time passes, the medical fees remain stubbornly high. For the peasantry who do not have money, if ever an epidemic strikes, they would only die in a struggle. This was why population growth is sluggish and the development of the borders cannot proceed. Despite all this having repeated itself countless of times, there were no signs that things was about to change.

Well, all this comes from my logic as a former modern Japanese who hails from the world of advanced science, philosophy and economics. If majority of the inhabitants of this world—the Itousera continent— lived prosperously, I don't suppose they would interfere with the status quo though.

That was a hindrance to my research, however.

Father's dagger eyes continued to appear stern, attacking me regarding what he calls a vulgar business.

"Do you not think it would be good for you to scold him over such a minor matter, father?"

Cutting into father's lecturing with a calm and classy tone was a youth who had been

watching over the course of events while in silence. He had luxuriant, soft golden hair and blue eyes. The facial features on his slender face was neat and tidy, and the expression that was suspended on his face oozed of well upbringing.
Lynes Strein Obeniel. My elder brother who was born seven years before me.

“Talese is a clever child. That he holds so much enthusiasm in tackling this path, won’t be it better to support him to some extent?”

“Ohh! As expected from elder brother, he said it with so much understanding!”

I shouted with exultation.

He was different from father who constantly neglects his domain. When it comes to father, he always claims that he was busy with social relations but in reality, he has only been indulging himself in opulence while in the capital. It wasn’t just once or twice when I heard invited guests at night parties badmouthing father’s extravagant lifestyle. In complete opposite, Brother Lynes was a studious worker. The only luxurious thing to speak of him was his interest in teas. Otherwise, he was a person who lives his life unaffected and sincere, with fortitude and vigour. All I can think of is that if after today or tomorrow and father passes away, it was likely that the current situation would be better compared to now if he inherited the family. That’s my review of my brother. He has been a great help to me.

Nevertheless, father looked like he was sulking as he slurped his soup and snorted with displeasure.

“You decided to talk insolently huh, Lynes.”

A greater displeasure compared, to how he usually preaches, surfaced in his eyes.

“That’s because it would be very convenient for you as an unworthy heir.”

He remarked. Why exactly was he finding fault with brother.

“Father..”

Brother gulped.

It was true that there if there was strife among us brothers to be the next head of family, it would be convenient for him for his rival to be indulgent in a shady hobby. However, that convenience extends to me too. If elder brother was an able successor, I would be able to dedicate myself to my own research after all.

"If someone as splendid as elder brother was considered as unworthy, father's expectations must be too high," I interjected in an amazed tone, "if you so desire such a capable successor, why don't you get yourself a second wife?"

"Oi, Talese."

Father's eyes opened up widely in extreme upsetness. He has, currently, a widower. The woman who was the mother of both brother and I died soon after giving birth to me. It was said that her postpartum recovery was difficult.

Even though father's white hair has started to stand out, he was still in his primes. A second wife would not be out of question for him but, he already has two sons and consequently, had little luck with a new one. Even though he might be a joke of a Count, his financial standing was not too bad. I wouldn't be surprised if there were one or two ladies out there scheming to gain money and social status by marrying into a Count Family.

He said with a foul expression.

".....If you wash your hands of alchemy, how about me fulfilling that wish of yours?"

What is this person saying?

"Please stop. Despite there not being any clear deficiency in brother's conduct, the order of young and old has been thrown out of order — this meaningless quarrel must be the root cause. I beg for your forgiveness father."

Something like eliminating the eldest son who did not comment on the younger son's cuteness was a very famous death flag in the Annals of the Three Kingdoms. Among the big camps that Cao Cao destroyed, was both the Yuan Family and the Jing Province Liu Family which both fit this current situation very well. It was the same in that era when either Liu Bei or Sun Quan was the stronger party. There was no reason for the Obeniel Family to follow down that path as well. After all, one of the most fundamental of the fundamentals in the Alcael Kingdom, was that the eldest son would succeed the family.

I openly articulated my thoughts about it but, father who was calmly ignoring my warning must be quite the imbecile.

"It is common in the world for parents to favour more capable children that were born later. All the more, it being irrational to treat our family property as a play thing. First of all, no matter how I, as the younger brother see it, elder brother is a worthy successor. Right?"

I sent a gaze that demanded agreement and brother's face stiffened grandly.

"A-Ahh... to hear you say that, I am very happy, Talese"

Then he sighed while muttering.

".....Really, you are just a child yet you are acting so impertinently, this is how you grown up to eh"

I can hear you, brother. You must have intended to say it quietly though. Father was likely thinking that perhaps I must be child prodigy that has surpassed elder brother from the adult-like way I have spoken. They were simply what I remembered of my behaviour when I was an adult before I reincarnated. In short, a scam, also known as a cheat. If I had to say it, my fifteen years old elder brother was an excellent child that has devoted himself to study for the sake of being the successor. Compared to the fifteen year old me of the past, he was definitely more outstanding.

Having said that, I do not plan to act like a child now. I was resigned to my fate as a baby, when I could not stop myself from soiling myself from bottom to top and also had to suck milk from the breasts of the nursing mother. That kind of play was, for a human who has no such inclinations, only agony and suffering. I had endured that over a year. If I was able to have the consciousness of an adult, and was able to walk upright on my own, it was only human that I wanted to assume that kind of adult-like tone. Though it can be said that not having patience and not keeping a low profile was overly childish move.

"Ahem," father cleared his throat.

"Well, we shall leave that be. You are already eight. You can't be spending your years playing and amusing yourself?"

This coming from the aristocrat who makes merry everyday, but I shall bear with it in the meantime and nod my head. The authority of the family head was absolute. It was one of the rules of a aristocrat's family.

"You are also roughly around the age when an aristocratic boy should learn how to use people. That being that, you will leave for the slave market in the afternoon to get one."

"A slave?"

I could tell that my facial expression was turning grim.

Slaves. They were at the lowest end of the hierarchy in this society. This was a world which was indifferent to the modern day concept of human rights. And thus, there exists slaves. As long as there was a harsh environment such as a mine, slaves were mainly the ones employed for the task.

Also, there were among the aristocrats and commoners in the affluent class, who would buy these slaves to do their housework. It goes without saying that slaves were made to do anything and everything for everyone. When it comes to one's future wealth and rank though, it was essential that the vassal serving you was compatible to your family's status.

In the case of the Obeniel Family, given that our peerage was that of a Count, a compatible status would largely refer to plebeians. As for close aides or personnel who participates in governmental affairs, a secondary retainer (think of it as a retainer serving a retainer) from a lower class aristocrat family would be serving them. For a Count Family to hire a slave back home would mean having to do the tough and dirty jobs... or maybe being the subordinate of a child who has not gotten used to using people. Starting off with slaves, then moving on to commoners, and finally lower aristocrats, all in order. This was how it goes to get used to ordering people.

Certainly it was appropriate for an eight year old to start practicing that, yet I have nothing but bad premonitions about it.

I asked timidly.

"Hmm, I do not mind but... how much would the estimated budget be?"

"Your worries are unnecessary. I will give you an advance on next month's allowance and send it over."

I knew it! I shifted my sight into skies instinctively.

The funds for my research were naturally from the allowance that I received from father. Although it may be an allowance for a child, it was an allowance as part of the only two sons of the Count, and besides, it was money that was simply passed by hand. It was an ample budget beyond the means of a normal eight year old child.

However, using next month's portion of allowance on buying a slave, what would happen to my research? Without sufficient cash, wouldn't that cause trouble to the

expenditures of my research for the next month? It's not like the materials and experiment equipment come by free, so just using them as per normal would lead to a decrease in my cash-flow.

There was also the problem of maintaining a slave. Even if we have her eat leftovers and thus save food costs as much as possible, there was also clothing expenses to consider. As the vassal of the son of a Count, it is important that the slave has a fitting appearance. Moreover, if the slave gets sick or is injured, there would also be treatment costs incurred.

For all these expenditures, would father cover it? Nope, there was no way he was forking out the cash. Since the allowance every month is more than adequate, it would be the end of the story by simply diverting money from that front. Raising the discussion that I would be unable to conduct my alchemy research would bring father back to his previous objection.

Father smiled with a "got ya" expression.

"A fine opportunity. It would serve to help you shift your mind's focus, and put you back on the right path as the son of an aristocrat."

To put simply, this was a stop research order taking on a different shape.

Stop joking. For me to have given up on alchemy research would mean that I must have died and that my life has come to an end because only then I could accept it. Despite being blessed with much luck and reincarnating into this world, there was no way I can accept being sent back to that world of emptiness without having lived for at least a hundred years!

I have to repeal this somehow ——

...

No, wait?

Having a slave would mean getting the slave to do as I will. For instance, if one human moves as I will without any problems, oh that's it.

If that was the case... being a helping hand in alchemy would not be problematic, yes? Even if I have to say so myself, that was an interesting notion.

At any rate, I feel like I am mired in a deadlock in my research recently. No matter how much of mature knowledge and intelligence I possess, it would seem that I have reached the limits of what a person can do alone. Furthermore, with an increase in manpower, the breadth of what I am able to achieve should be greater. At the very least, if the slave was at the same frequency as myself, the headcount would be raised from one to two and by simple calculation, it means a doubling of manpower.

Of course, if it was a slave that barely has any knowledge, time would have to be spent into training the slave in alchemy but, if I am able to make the slave skillful in alchemy,

the returns would be higher.

Now that I think of it, this wasn't that bad of a trade. Anything but a windfall, or like how one finds a boat just when one needs to cross a river.

"Indeed, as Father has mentioned — it is perhaps a golden opportunity"

I concealed the emotions on my face, and tried as much to appear crestfallen while replying.

It was so that I can hide my scorn for the party that I am deceiving that I have to hide my joy which might suggest that this was actually a good idea for myself.

This should be sufficient. It was a purchase that would nearly completely wipe out next month's allowance. I would at least procure a slave that stands out from the crowd as much as possible!

Towards my reply, father did not even bother hiding his self-satisfaction, whereas brother gave a scrutinising eye to me, as though something feels off.



As such, we made our way to the Brosenul slave market.

It might be called the corner of a street but it was a raving trade zone in the royal capital of the world. It wasn't that I had no opinions of it as a former modern Japanese, but that was that, and if there was nothing to force my hand, I should be able to tolerate it to that extent. All hail the principle of letting the sleeping dogs lie.

"So, young master. What kind of slave do you desire?"

The subordinate tasked by father to act as my bodyguard and to look after me spoke with ostentatious bravado.

He was given the name of first generation knight and was a former commoner, so it seems. I'm not close with him and do not know much about him though. Even though we may not be well acquainted with the commoners, I still have some limited knowledge of it. This was what it means to have a world view.

The look on his eyes while staring at the price tag on silver collars worn by the slaves were coloured more strongly by pity than of scorn. This was likely because they were of a lower strata comparatively. Nevertheless, the look of contempt could never be erased, that much I can perceive from how he looks at the slaves of the commoners (though they are of close social strata).

"Mm, I want someone who would serve as a study material for my education on vassals... if possible, someone who is young and close in age would be nice. I am also eyeing the possibility of having the slave as my helper so it would be even better if the slave has foundations in magic."

Ignoring the convenience for him, I stated my requirements and standards from start to end. Alchemy was both a study and a type of magic at the same time. It would not be worth considering anyone without a minimum level of magic ability. On a side note, I am able to manipulate magic. I could somewhat use flame magic to the extent of playing with fire and could also heal small wounds.

"Eh? Something like being pretty and all, isn't any of that part of your scope?"

"With that included, won't that increase the price?"

Additionally, having that kind of enjoyment at my age would be too early. Well, having a pretty and cute appearance might be good for my mood but throwing a large amount of money for that purpose was absurd.

"While you are at it, I'll like to see them according to their prices, starting with the cheapest."

A slave of a young age would be cheap as long as it was not an anomaly. A child of a similar age that I have requested should be relatively concentrated in the marketplace.

"Oh?"

The attendant replied and switched to a business-like expression. Fine by me. What he might be thinking of now was of no concern to me. Doing what I have to do and not doing what I don't need to do was all I should be concerned about.

Thinking with zero charm of a child, I scanned through the slaves.

The products were mainly, as I have thought, the children of peasants, whose parents had sold. For a society with a undeveloped agricultural industry, just a single blizzard or drought could put most of the peasantry in a dilemma. Even without any natural disasters, as long as there was a foolish lord who levied heavy taxes, their circumstances would never recover. With these conditions and the added fact that there were families who bore babies unreservedly like mice, whenever the situation

turns for the worst, they would sell the children whom they are unable to provide for.... This country, Alcael Kingdom, should be relatively blessed in terms of food security compared to other countries and yet, why was there this many peasants facing such destitute? No doubt their hardship was proportional to the idiocy of the group lording above them. People like the head of my family huh.

Back to the topic. In the second group, there were many criminals. The Itousera continent was medieval-like but civilisation here was at about the level during the Renaissance period. There was no such advanced thing like a prison. At least, I do know that there was no such facility in which commoners would be housed after being arrested. Criminals who committed a small crime would be detained in a cell temporarily upon being captured, and would subsequently be asked to pay a fine. Those who were unable to pay for their fines or who had committed large crimes would fall into the shackles of slavehood. And there were those who face immediate execution after committing unpardonable atrocities. There were cases of powerful aristocrats or high ranking clergymen being allowed to retire at the borders —a euphemism for soft detention— but well, they were the exceptions. Would it be alright to buy slaves that were former criminals? That was what was in my mind, but there was that. A spell to force the slaves into submission to prevent rebellion had already been activated on them. The result of which was the silver collar that they wearing on their necks. As expected of this fantasy world, as long as there was magic, nothing was out of question.

And, the minority among the slaves were the demi-humans, elves and dwarves. That's right, demi-humans. There were other living beings with intelligence in this world. Apart from these human-like races who tend to live long, there were also talking dragons but I have not seen those yet. They were statistically rare and it was also a pain to capture them. Naturally, even if they were circulating in the market, their prices would be exorbitantly high. Honestly, it wasn't something that could be purchased with the allowance of a child from a Count Family. To make matters worst, the loyalty of these races as slaves were low owing to the wall between races. Also, the elves had a natural gift in the arcane arts and there were fears that they could undo the spell that forces their obedience. It would be romantic but given my circumstances, they were definitely not within consideration.

What I am looking out for would be the slaves that I mentioned second, the former criminals... or more accurately put, its analogues. Due to domestic squabbles or suspicions of rebellion, an entire family might be crushed and to avoid the implications of such, there are children that have fallen to the ranks of slaves. This

means that there was a possibility that a slave that has been conveniently educated to a certain extent existed in the market. I would be able to spare the effort of teaching the basics; my desire for such a slave was such that my hands would come out from my throat.

In fact, if it was the child of an aristocrat, there was a greater likelihood that the slave could use magic.

The roots of magic. These were determined innately, and so, to some extent, magic could be inherited from parent to child. Above that, magic requires chanting and skill to be used so children have to be taught properly to use magic. This was fundamentally a trait of the high society. Besides that, in Itousera, science was undeveloped and thus the main choice of weapons were swords and magic. It would be disastrous if the populace starts a revolution and therefore, people talented in magic and important texts for magic acquisition were strictly regulated by the noble class. Utility men that might be called adventurers might have magicians among them but these people were probably bound to the wills of aristocrats or were fallen aristocrats.

These thoughts ran through my mind, as I checked the slaves one by one in the order of price.

Their levels of magic comprehension can be estimated from the amount of magic they discharge in the air. Similarly, there were tricks that could be used to hide these discharges but if there were slaves who possessed such a skill, their prices would be markedly higher too. Would the seller deceive me so as to reduce their prices? Any respectable vendor wouldn't do that. Nobody would wear both home clothes bought at a bargain sale and a branded suit at the same time. If it was really made cheap, it would be because there was an expectation for a favour to be returned later on. For me to sell my personal belongings and assets would mean that I must be in a scenario where I had been driven into a corner, but I would still follow my principles of selling as high a price as I could.

Yep, I do not sense anyone like that among them. Slaves who possess magic really do number few. Same goes for slaves that have received education. No choice here, I have to try another shop with products of a higher grade.

That was when I felt it.

“.....Oh?”

I could feel something attracting me. A rather fine quality of magical aura. Though it was certainly a feeble sensation, it was quite refined. Still, the attraction was in no way

weak. As far as I know, the quality of magic was usually proportional to the quantity of magic. It was considerably rare to feel this excellent quality of magic yet meagre quantities of it.

Could it be that the source of it, was dying? I have always secluded myself and focused on research, and so far, the people I have met were all healthy people. I hardly had any experience with people gasping for survival who were on the brink of death. All the more people with such scarce quality of magic. I have witnessed countless scenes of slaves being killed after incurring the rage of father or brother, but these victims never did possess any roots of magic. At any rate, the way brother killed without any hesitation was indeed testimony as to how slaves were not treated as humans. Anyhow, with the possibility that I have found myself a bargain, I looked towards where the magic was being emitted from.

"This one's condition is kinda severe..."

Towards where my line of sight lay, the male attendant spoke in a muffled voice. Indeed, this slave was in a tragic state.

That slave was probably a young girl. Comparing her physical body to mine, she was one or two years younger than me I suppose.

There were vestiges of her long black hair being combed but, currently it was in a dishevelled state. Judging from her well-built body and the whiteness of her skin, I could only imagine that before she descended to such a level, she was living in a reasonably well environment. However, that only makes it a greater tragedy.

Had she been badly beaten up repeatedly? Every spot from her eyes to her nose was swelling. I had to make a deduction at her gender, and use the word 'probably' because of her battered condition. This must resemble nothing like her original appearance. The crude slave clothing, a simple attire consisting of a large piece of cloth with a hole in the middle for the head, on her can only be described as a jute bag full of holes. Taking a closer look, there was dried blood and dirty black filth on the region between her thighs. It may be because of the lacerations on her lower body that she was unable to stand. Before falling into the market, this must have been the state she has been after being violently used by the previous seller for enjoyment. How could one break a person whose age remained in the single digits to such an extent? It was world which I fail to comprehend.

Truly a terrible lack of self-control. Had she been sold when she was still pretty, she

would have been worth a sizable amount of money.

I took a glimpse at her price tag.

“.....How expensive.”

I unintentionally muttered.

The price written was a price that just reached what I would call expensive based on the budget I received. It shouldn't be the price to a person who was barely even breathing and slowly losing to death.

Given that she possesses a rare and excellent quality of magic, there was no choice about it but at the very least, it would have been better if she had received some treatment. If that had been done, I am sure she can be displayed on the second grade shops. No, if she was in her healthy state, her magic quantity should return back to normal levels and just that alone, it wouldn't be strange if she fetched the highest price today.

Well, a slave market isn't a magician service office. Even if the shop vendors knew the amount of magic one has, they would not be able to be able to understand the true degree of it. I can sense their lack of effort in the trade but all the more I have no duty and intention of demanding improvements.

“Let's go, young master. These kids are so pathetic they shouldn't even make the cut.”

The male attendant lightly pulled on my sleeves.

I shook him off.

“Wait a moment.”

Ignoring my attendant who gasped, I leaned to the side of her.

I made another inspection on her and as I had deduced, her hands show no trace of labour. Her right wrist appeared to be fractured having been grabbed strongly on it but otherwise, her palm was beautiful.

Her barefooted feet had been grazed by the stone bed but the shape of her nails were intact. The tip of her feet and her ankles had not been in contact with the bed and so, were unhurt. She must have been using shoes or socks before being sold.

All this points to her being a child raised in a well-to-do household. Either her family has met with ruin or she was kidnapped, ending up in this slave market.

In other words, she was likely the candidate I was looking for — a child who has received education to a certain level.

...I brooded over this for a short interval.

First of all, she was near my age, so father would find her a suitable subject matter to train me in using retainers.

On another note, she was what I was looking for, a child who has probably received a fair amount of education.

And... her magic was top-tiered.

To put it bluntly, if we include the possibility that she might be an outstanding talent in the future, this doesn't seem expensive at all. It was actually a bargain sale which placed the price within my reach.

The only problem here was that she was a defective good that might die anytime soon.

Was she really a good buy? If I could bring her home and she survives, that would be a cause for celebration. Still, if the worst came to be, there was a possibility that I would have wasted the entirety of next month's allowance in purchasing a dead corpse. What would I do if that happened? After doing such a dumb thing, being remonstrated by father would seem like an overly optimistic scenario. If I was unlucky, I would no longer be entrusted with large amounts of money and it was highly likely that my allowance in the coming months would be reduced.

Was there any other way this could play out?... Nothing else especially.

It goes without saying that my standing would decline sharply. Father would probably show less affection towards me. However, what of that? The real issue is that father has been showering excessive care for me and might make me the next successor. If that happens, it would be inevitable for a clash to occur between brother and I. Even if I won against him, I would have to pursue a career in politics as the head of a Count Family and would have to abandon my research. No, in the worst case, the authorities might use domestic quarrel as an excuse to crush us.

With that in consideration, more or less losing points now would be within the range of making an investment for the future. It should be okay to rely on brother who was sincerely motivated to take on the role as family head. As long as I can receive a certain extent of financial support and can continue to conduct my experiments to achieve immortality, I am satisfied. The only inconvenience of buying a dying slave, in fact, one who next to death's door, might be that the temporarily halting of my research. In any case, I have already reached the limits of what I can do alone for my research. If that

actually occurs, all I have to do is to save up money while thinking of it as a long break that the gods are giving me.

If I missed, I would be back to zero; but if I hit the mark, I would profit. Thinking of it that way does make it look like I was buying a lottery ticket.

I could manage injuries somehow or another so I would heal this girl's injuries and give her another chance at life. Elder brother's position as the successor would be secured with the failures of his rival, so father should be able to tell who is really appropriate to be a successor. Let's just deal with whatever that happens later!

"Alright. This child, I'm buying her."

"Young master!?"

The male attendant following me opened his eyes wide in exaggeration. "I cannot believe this," was plastered all over of his face. A typical and normal reaction.

Ignoring that, I peered into the face of the young girl who was cowering. I disregarded the acrid odour invading my nostrils. Having experience of handling chemical compounds when brewing medication, I have already gotten used to this level of stinkiness.

"What is your name?"

"....."

The young girl with a swollen face, mumbled something inaudibly. Did she give her name as instructed or did she hurl some vulgarities in a fit, or was she just muttering incoherently? I could not make an accurate assessment on that.

"Well, I will hear it next time when you are able to reply. Therefore, hmm... could you bring me to someone whom I can discuss this purchase to?"

She brought me to the person as I had asked of her. The deal was brokered within two replies from the slave vendor even though he gave a suspicious look throughout.

Well, it must be because she was a slave that had one foot in the grave and was not a slave that most people would give a second look to. He must be thinking, "this child must be rather dimwitted no matter how inexperienced he is".

--With that, I managed to procure her.
I did not know what kind of meaning she might bring from hereon.

Chapter 1

My First Lady <First Half>

I brought my first slave and future helper candidate – Number 1-chan (temp) back home, and as I had expected, a small uproar erupted.

Father was visibly shaken while brother appeared as though he has just seen a monster. The other servants were boisterous. All in all, it was terrible. Well, that was a reaction which I had foreseen.

Treating father's lecturing and whatever else he was saying as wind in the air, I returned to the lab which was located underneath the mansion. I made Number 1-chan sleep on the bed which I usually reserve for napping. She was still breathing. Though, I have no way of knowing if her heart would stop beating later.

Being a self-learnt alchemist and also a person who has reincarnated from modern Japan, I had some understanding of medical science. Albeit it being superficial knowledge, a novice like me should be able to understand one thing or two from conducting a medical examination. It seems that the violence inflicted on Number 1-chan was more gruesome and dark than I have imagined.

What was written on her body as a recurring theme were the marks of hesitation. Deserving of special mention were the bones on her face which appeared to have been recklessly smashed while healing magic was applied. This sort of life prolongment wasn't the product of overflowing kindness. It was something more insidious and hideous.

Simply speaking, the broken bones were patched up in a distorted shape on purpose, so as to prevent her face from ever becoming what it used to be. To make matters worse, her misery was extended to the skin on her face. It had been bitten and torn apart, to the extent of pus oozing out from here and there. With this, even if her life was spared for argument's sake, the rest of her life would be spent in this condition. There were probably few priests in the church who would be able to heal her. Not only that, factor in the medical costs, which were commonly termed as 'alms', would cost quite a bit. This means, for a being like a slave who had no connection to money, she

would not be able to get healed her whole life.

No matter how you think about it, this shouldn't have been done on a young child who's age ranged in the single digits. In fact, it should not be acceptable on an adult either.

From the relentless theme of destroying her appearance, I couldn't help but think that this was an act committed by another female, who had profound jealousy or some obsessive hatred towards her. It looked similar to what Chinese Empress Lü Zhi or Wu Zetian would do their husband's lovers.

"Was she sold as a slave to achieve that very goal?"

Was this the so called Human Swine¹, an anecdote notorious for its cruelty. Or something of the like. After making her a slave, society's lowest denominator, she was further ridiculed since nobody would be interested in her as a slave. An inhumane plot.

Well, all this is of no concern to me. I purchased her, not the other way round; I was in no way hired as a lawyer. I am not in the least interested in getting entwined to someone who would inflict such an unspeakable suffering on a young girl.

What I will do to her is a separate topic.

—Chi, Chi, Chi, squeaked the rats that were trapped in the cage.

Ah, right, it was time to feed them. Facing the rats, I threw sunflower seeds at them. The rats in the cage picked up what I had thrown at them with "both hands" and nibbled on them.



Full body anesthesia.

Blood thickening medicine.

Ablation of suppuration area.

Realignment of distorted skeletal structure.

Grafting of artificial muscles and artificial skin on the face.

Etcetera, etcetera...

In any case, I tried many procedures. It was also my first time doing a human experiment on a genuine human, and so I tried my best. This was because I have only played small-scale "childish pranks" on the servants...

It goes without saying that no matter how much adult intellect I held as an reincarnator, I am still an amateur in alchemy and it was not like I studied to be a doctor previously. There were many instances of first-time surgeries failing. Possible ways to fail include cutting things that were not supposed to be cut or maybe making mistakes when the supply of anesthesia has been cut off. It was especially difficult without anesthesia when removing the skin on her face to remove pus. I was afraid that Number 1-chan (temp) might tremble in pain and awaken. If that was the case, I rather she just scream. It was important to be able to continue the surgery without being noticed, since the pain might lead to shock-inducing death.

I managed to overcome all the possible ways to fail and managed to complete the general treatment. It might as well been magic. The skills I have employed were the basics of the basics, what you might view as having only learned techniques a level zero would have but even then, the damage done to her blood vessels were to the extent which could be healed with recovery magic and other kinds of useful healing items which had been prepared. Since I could freely use all these, I could make up for the pitfalls in my inexperience. Fantasy is really awesome. If magic was that convenient, I don't think there would be any motivation to advance science huh.

Especially analysis magic which could decipher the composition and structure of a material, it was really amazing. Thanks to it, I was able to decipher that Number 1-chan (temp) face had been disfigured with malicious intents and could also infer the original shape of her face. No, it was more like the fruits of my labours. Understanding the structure of materials were the very fundamentals of alchemy.

...However, despite the room reeking with the stench of blood, I was wholly calm and yet, my mind seem to feel somewhat dizzy?

I might conclude that this was all for treating someone but the me from the previous world would have never thought that I would do insert sharp tools into other bodies. I have repeated this quite a few times but I wasn't a doctor previously and in fact, I detested injections. I would have never imagined myself pointing a knife at someone, even in a brawl or something.

In fact, that I was able to so naturally do this to a slave; that I would accept doing such a human experiment, it could only mean that.

Yes, I might not be have lived in this world for more than ten years but my mind and

soul has long been poisoned by the nobles of this world. If you are not a noble, you are not a human. Something like that. Humans often allocated unique duties to others and the others would further allocate these duties down the hierarchy, such behaviour which was modelled as a theory in psychology could make for a theme in a movie in my previous world. Wasn't this similar to what was happening in this world?

Or perhaps, the roots of my personality could just be broken.

Well, I am person who has died once. My view on life and view on humans would have more or less changed. It was inevitable.

I digress.

As I have mentioned, Number 1-chan (temp)'s treatment was for now successful. Her face which has been distorted with ill will, returned to its former state of beauty. The portions that were violently cut were also fixed.

There were no signs of infections given that the place was well-maintained and sanitised.

Still, what I done was only treat her physical body. The aspect of mental care was entirely untouched.

I do not know the accurate events that occurred but she must have been the daughter of a person with status, and one day, she was attacked suddenly by a beast and made an outlet for lust, moreover, her looks were thoroughly destroyed. And let's not forget that her age was still in the single digits. There was no way this wouldn't leave a trauma on her. More like, if that wasn't the case, then something must be very wrong with her.

And the proof was that she was already able to speak without any difficulties and yet, I have not heard her utter a single word which held meaning. This includes her name. Thanks to it, I am stuck with calling her Number 1-chan (temp) up till now. Err, of course I did not actually say the words "(temp)".

As I was saying, that aspect is beyond my expertise. Eh? You ask why can't I do counseling as a person with knowledge of the previous world? You must be kidding. I hardly venture out of the mansion after being reincarnated. If you put it nicely, I can be considered an indoor person but the mean way of saying it would be that I was a

shut-in. As a shut-in, there was no way I was capable of counseling. You could say that I have a smattering amount of knowledge in the field of psychology from my previous life — read from the internet entirely. My level of knowledge could be considered to be at a miscellaneous level. Just Freud's dream analysis and his theory of psychosexual development was more than a handful for me. Even for the medical treatment for her body, I should be able to manage with my magic and what I can remember from my days of being a student in a biology class. Any expectations beyond that, would be troubling for me.

Just to confirm again, there was a possibility that Number 1-chan (temp) would become more petrified than before if I were to deal with her poorly or make her work cruelly like how the others did. When I took her back, I had no idea if her life was a candle burning out. After that I prescribed medicine of which effects I did not understand well and tweaked her body while she was unconscious. All this was a gamble. It was the same for the previous world, even in a climate of advanced medical science, before a major surgery, patients would have to find their peace as they entrust themselves to their surgeons. Even at the dentist waiting room, there were many people who wore faces like that of a prisoner awaiting their execution. All the more for children. Moreover, I was barely a eight year old child who was naturally unlicensed. Though in the first place, there was no such thing as a doctor's license in this world. That's why, distrust and fear for doctors was like unagi rapidly swimming upwards. If it was me performing the treatment, it would definitely turn out that way.

It was a nuisance. And I wanted to have her work as my helper after treating her too. Having animosity and distrust against me would hinder me from educating her.

Certainly, the magic to force slaves into obedience was active by default so I could still bulldoze my way through but, it goes without saying that it would be greater progress if I could get the person herself to proactively collaborate in this endeavour.

I pray that the distrust she carried against me would be as small as possible.



A few days later. In the same old laboratory.

“Yo, Number 1-chan (temp). Today is finally the day the bandages can be taken off you!”

“.....?”

It was unbefitting of my character to say it with this much spirit yet the response from Number 1-chan (temp) was silence as she raised her head covered full with bandages.

In the end, until today, we did not establish a single conversation. I did attempt to communicate with her many times but Number 1-chan (temp) always kept hush. There were no defects in her vocal cords, and her tongue which was bitten probably when she was being hit was healed too. Despite so, she did not even let out a scream of agony. It was like she had rejected everything of this world.

Hmm, even though it would be great if it was possible to open up her heart slightly with this opportunity. Well, if I was her in shoes and I was treated without giving my consent, I too would not trust nor have any confidence in that person.

As I ruminated through my thoughts, I made her sit on a chair and face a full-length mirror that was installed by the wall. She offered no resistance, just like a doll. Somehow, it felt as though I have become a beautician. Rather than actually giving her a haircut, it was more like mowing grass though. That was because it would have gotten in the way of the surgery. It's not like her hair wouldn't grow back.

“Now then, I am removing them. Don’t move okay?”

Cutting off the knots with a pair of scissors, I unwound the rest of the bandage slowly from the cut-off piece. There were faint sounds of cloth rubbing off the skin but nothing worrying like foreign substance adhesing itself on the skin occurred. It was truly a smooth peel.

Sure enough, her bare face was something acceptable for my eyes. A smooth and natural line was drawn on her outlines. Her skin was rich with youthful vitality. Her facial features were still that of an immature child but there was not a single distortion to her mould.

To anybody out there, could you upon seeing this face, imagine that a thoroughly ravaged appearance could be reborn like this?

Flawless.

A flawless success.

“——Wonderful.”

A sudden tremor passed through my spine. The sense of achievement I felt from this was unprecedented even considering all my other experiences from my past life. Really wonderful. I, with my own hands, was capable of using a delicate technique to come this far. And this so called alchemy industry, could bring forth such a miracle!

“.....”

I wondered if she reacted to my words. She lifted her eyelids slowly. She opened wide her big and beautiful green eyes and stared at the person in the mirror.

“.....!?”

The countenance on her face as well as the reflection's became that of bewilderment. Surprise, confusion, and likely delight. Her white skin, her reddening and dampening eyes elucidated an emotion that was by no means a minus.

“How is it, Number 1-chan (temp)! This is some piece of work isn't it? Honestly speaking, I myself never imagined that it would turn out like this!”

“Sniff... sniff...”

Despite having congratulated her, Number 1-chan (temp) started to sob uncontrollably. Compared to her earlier self when her expression changed, it was as though there was no pause in the change at all. The muscles on her face governing emotion seems to be functioning normally.

“T-Thank you ve-very much...!”

I could hear her uttering in a blurry voice. Thinking about it now, this was the first time I heard her say anything at all. To have so frankly given her thanks to me, even though I did whatever I pleased as much as I liked till today. Truly, a well brought up child. I suppose her parents taught her discipline well.

“No way, I should be the one giving you my thanks! You have really endured a lot to have made it here! It was a valuable experiment!”

Overcomed with emotions, I embraced her and she soon return the embrace with her

tiny hands.

Tears and mucus dirtied my clothing but I couldn't care less. Compared to the bloody pus that I extracted during the wretched operation, this was nothing.

Inside the dimly lit basement, the young us caught hold of one another as we immersed ourselves in the joy of initial success.



"Talese... who is that child?"

I brought her out from the basement and father saw her. He was clearly taken aback. Naturally, I threw my chest out without the slightest hint of guilt and replied.

"What are you saying Father. This is my slave."

"Hah...?"

Unfortunately, my reply had only induce more and more confusion in father. He blinked his eyes in rapid succession.

".....You bought a second one?"

"You are mistaken. Before then, her figure was in a tragic state of injuries and she couldn't show her true face but now I have finally healed her. And thus, I brought her up. C'mon, give your greetings to Father."

".....Nice to meet you, I am, Yuni."

Former Number 1-chan (temp) held on the sleeves of my shirt while giving a clumsy bow to father. How it ended up being Yuni was because it would obviously be disastrous for others to know that her name was Number 1-chan (temp) so it was the name she thought of hastily. I have a faint inkling about it but I am sure that its meaning was "a single object". To have pass off a name related to one, because her name was Number 1; it felt like that there was no big change to her name.

Incidentally, I do not know her real name. I tried asking what happened before I bought her but the reception from her was unfavourable. I couldn't tell if she refused to reply or whether she was unable to reply. What I merely healed was her outer appearance. Her interior must be in disorderly state even now I suppose. To the extent

of not knowing oneself even though she was herself. I am interested to know more about her personal history but, well, that can be left for later when she composes herself.

“Hah?”

Father opened his mouth wide.

He must have thought it to be inconceivable that a half-dead person with a face full of swellings could, in a short period of time, recover to this state of beauty. That must be it. My only bet was that she would survive and had predicted that some degree of scarring should remain even if she did not die. Yet, she overturned that verdict and exposed a face with not a single flaw to the world.

This extent of treatment has been pulled off by a kid who wasn’t even ten. Being in disbelief should be expected. I believe I would laugh scornfully if I heard from others about a similar tale like this.

Father took roughly one minute to digest the situation but he still showed hesitation as he stammered.

“Ye-Yes... an ex-excellent job, Talese. To have personally healed a completely defective slave... your ability has left me in utter wonder!”

“No, no, it must have been the result of her life force. I never expected that her recovery to reach this extent.”

“Ha,ahaha... being excessively humble would only make you sound sarcastic though?”

Somehow or another, him praising my skill would mean that the integrity of his head has grasped what has occurred.

“Ahem,” father coughed and continued, “However, have you forgotten the objective we laid from the beginning? I made you buy a slave so that you could learn the ways to tame your retainers. Even though your practice at healing has gone smoothly, I will not permit you to neglect your main duty.”

“Yes, certainly.”

That goes without saying. From the start, I picked Yuni on the basis of her magic powers. From here on, this child would become my loyal servant, and also a promising

helper. For that, I would definitely have to thoroughly educate her.

"Regarding that, Father. I plan on having her learn the basic etiquette for now. If it is possible, may I have the help of the maids from our mansion who are not busy?"

For starters, we will work on the superficials.

There is a saying that goes: the face follows but the stomach opposes, but to really detach the face from the stomach would be both unexpected and difficult. Much less of Yuni who doesn't seem to be a reincarnator like me. She was a 100% genuine child. If that was the case, if I let the way of living obediently under others seep into her mind from young, when she grows into an adult, she would probably have a submissive personality.

Without any inclination that I was thinking about such insolence, father nodded his head in what appears to be annoyance.

"Do as you like. I would allow that kind of activities."

"Thank you very much."

The conversation ended and he left the venue in a rush.

"Alright, I obtained permission from Father. I would have you work hard immediately from today. You good?"

"Yes, master."

Yuni spoke in a flat voice that did not hint at any emotion. I wonder if it was because of the gratitude from being healed but for now, she behaved loyally to my orders. Still, there was no way I would be satisfied with just that. Humans were living beings who would grow to become independent. We might be bound by the slave contract and her gratitude but there was no proof that this kind of relationship would continue forever.

Firstly, her magic alone had a substantial quality to it. Being my helper, she would have to accumulate information on alchemy and magic, and if so, it was plausible for her to dispel the obedience magic by herself. To maintain this relationship of master and servant, I would have to strictly teach her the behaviour and etiquette, and through repetitive learning, firmly instill faithfulness. In the future, I am considering the possibility of applying a sophisticated brainwashing magic — otherwise known as

brain restructuring.

This might be too cowardly of me. However, I am a reincarnated human. A human that has died once. I am going to have to say no to dying a second time. That's why an existence that follows my command and move as my arms and legs, absolutely cannot betray me.

As much as I could, I produced a kind-looking face and grinned at her.



A week from when Yuni started her training, she became able to behave at a bare minimum level for a servant. As expected, before she ended up in tatters and being sold to the slave market, she was likely born and raised in a family that should have a social status equivalent to that of an aristocrat. She was able to perform the basics of courtesy like the ABCs and her speed of learning wasn't bad either.

Still, once her free time started, it was time for her training to be my helper and bodyguard.

What we did from the start was to build up her strength.

“Hey hey, your legs are coming to a stop! Move, move! One, two! One, two!”

“Ye-Yes! Master.”

On fine days, I brought bodyguards out to the outskirts of the city and made Yuni run. Before becoming a slave, she must have been the esteemed daughter of somebody and after being a slave, she lived in the underground lab for treatment. After going through that kind of life, she could not even last 5 minutes before starting to pant. Well, this wasn't like a park or an exercise field like my previous world, and was a wild field overrun by weeds and small stones hidden in the shadows. Supposing that she was confident in her endurance, it would still be tough I guess.

“Young master... what in the, what is the point of doing this?”

A servant said in puzzlement. It was the same servant that accompanied me when I was buying Yuni. This time too, he came along as the bodyguard and the coachman.

“Can't you understand from looking? I am building physical strength. I have to

occasionally bring her out to do some exercise."

No matter what one is doing, the most important is one's physical strength. In a fantasy world where magic roams freely, that was the first thing I learnt. Offensive magic or recovery magic and on top of that, transmuting substances with alchemy, etcetera etcetera, each and every one of these magic progress according to the consumption of the user's magic powers. In this aspect, it does bear semblance to computer games in my previous world. Still, it differs in one area. Once one's magic power was depleted, it would have an effect on the body. In most of the cases, symptoms of shortness of breath and palpitations, dizziness and confusion to one's awareness would surface. To put it bluntly, exhausting all magic power would render one incredibly tired.

When I first picked up magic, I did not have a good gauge of my limits and had the experience of fainting multiple times. There was this one time, for example, when I was in the middle of mixing some strong medicine when my consciousness receded and because of that, I nearly caused a fire in the basement.

And thus, ever since then, I came up with a countermeasure. To endure the acute tiredness when one has been drained of magic powers, one has to train the physical body as far as possible. It was a simple concept but it should be enough for a measure.

It was just at the level of a hypothesis but I think it was a hypothesis with a rather high accuracy of being right. The evidence was that I heard from adults that most people who faint from magic exhaustion were children or the elderly with poor physical constitutions. There were limited examples but the evidence pointed strongly towards people with weak bodies. However, this was hardly a methodology. In any case, most of the magicians, devote the majority of their resources towards attaining the greatest magic powers or newest magic skills, (and in my case, for an alchemist) it would be assigned to experimenting and creating magic equipment. There would not be any free time dedicated to building the body. The house tutor who taught me magic — who has stop coming exactly a year ago — was also rumoured to sweat like a barbarian. (*TN: not really sure what the author means by this. Sweating like a barbarian = not fit? Or = fit?*)

Well, there was a some point to it. Time flows infinitely but human lives have their limits. It was entirely rational to concentrate the maximum amount of time on one's priorities and keep the others to a minimum. Increasing one's magic powers to the upper most levels would naturally mean lower chance of magic exhaustion happening.

However, what I hoped for Yuni wasn't to just be a fixed artillery, chanting magic. To go adventuring in place of me to collect required materials as my helper as well as to act as my bodyguard since I was a non-combatant. It would be unimaginable if she were to be exhausted due to a lack of magic power. There was a need to nurture her reflexes and forge her stamina while she was still a child.

"I never expected this fella to be so stringent. That young lady hasn't had time to recover from injuries right?"

"Like I said, I have to build her stamina quickly. That way her training later can move in the right direction."

At the very least, she has to recover to the point of being able to walk about in the mansion without any problems. That's why I have to quickly train her. Exactly in this period, since I bought her, I am strapped for cash and the research had to stop temporarily. For the sake of Yuni and while I have time to spare, it was the evident conclusion to have her basic abilities improve now.

In addition, included among the treatment performed on her was artificial skin grafting. I would love to obtain data on how she reacts to long exposure to sunlight. Also, I could harvest medicinal plants in the vicinity or think about how to counter monsters that appear in proximity of civilisation — you heard me right, monsters exist. A long time ago, a demon lord existed — also, I could also learn about the raw materials that can be obtained by being present on the actual site. Three birds one stone.

"Do not worry. I have no intention to destroy this hard found talent before my eyes."

I shrugged my shoulders and said. I pointed towards the shoes that I bought for Yuni to walk in the fields and the socks worn inside which would prevent blisters. I even prepared water and would make sure she hydrates herself plenty when the opportunity arises. If she trips or gets bitten by poisonous insects, I could treat her.

"I can hardly understand what young master is thinking..."

The male attendant scratched his head with a pained expression. That was not the way to speak to the family of his employer but I'll let that slide. This would be the normal reaction of an adult. It was only because I felt that it was necessary, else I wouldn't be

doing this either. This might not be very persuasive but I do not have a hobby of bullying girls. It was just that as I watched the figure of Yuni in the distance, trying her best to fulfil my expectations, a deep emotion prodded my chest.

“One, Tw... one, tw... ha, hah...”

Soon, the attendant and I became silent and the only sounds that filled the plains were the shouts and rough breathing of Yuni.

...At the end, Yuni became entirely spent after around 30 minutes. She couldn't even get on board the coach without my hand to support her. For the first day, she worked very hard. I think I would treat her to a miracle drug that rejuvenates later.



A month passed.

“Yuni. Today, I'll have you remember the recipe for a simple drug. Understand?”

“Yes, master-sama.”

Rather than a long way from growing, she seem to be entering a full-blown period of growth; compared to a long time ago, she has physically improved to a large extent due to daily training. I do not think she would give up if it was just mashing medicinal herbs with a pestle.

Using the herbs found near the plains of the outskirts (when she was working out) as the ingredients, the lowest grade of potion can be made. I have to ensure that she was at least able to make that.

“You don't have to be so nervous. I was able to do this three years ago, so it shouldn't be that challenging. Remember, the first step is to —”



Another month passed.

“Finally, our medicines have hit the market.”

“Congratulations, master.”

We gathered around a table which had a leather pouch on top of it. We were captivated. Inside the pouch was the currency of this world, the lowest denomination with the lowest worth — copper coins. Something cheap would be worth this much coins. If we go to the money-exchanger, this should be worth a few pieces of silver I reckon.

Father indicated his displeasure upon hearing that our homemade medicine was sold out in the market. The reason being that a person in an Earl’s Family should not be imitating the vulgar business of a merchant. Persuading him was especially bone-breaking. Compared to making the merchant guild recognise the quality of my products, I felt it was far more troublesome.

“However, I managed to procure an income source that was somewhat passable.”

When I considered that, I couldn’t help but lift my lips into a grin. Up till now, all my research funding depended on the small allowance father gave me, but since I could do my own trade now, I should be able to be self-sufficient despite it being a very small sum of money. If father’s patience runs out and he decides to stop the alchemy research, it shouldn’t be a problem now. I won’t be able to avoid shrinking the scope of the research but at least I can continue the research by my own efforts.

“Just a bit more savings and... I should be moving on to the next stage of research.”



A month later.

“Ngg... Ngooo...”

“Master-sama, Number 2’s body temperature is climbing. Perspiration has also been observed.”

“The status of the pupil of the eye?”

“.....It is contracting.”

As I heard the report from Yuni, I started listing down the data on a piece of paper that

I was holding onto. In the middle of the room, there was a newly installed operating table. On it was a male who was gagged and chained. The metal fixtures that constrained him rattled endlessly.

What am I doing? As you can see, it was a human experiment.

In order to materialise my ultimate goal of immortality, it was essential to have data regarding the biology of a human and its various functions. For example, medicines have to be tested in advance and whether it is administered to myself or to others, it was important to determine the effectiveness of medicines.

Previously, I had Yuni conduct a few experiments on animals and there was plenty of data resulting from it but, for more intricate and complex medical procedures, data from human experiments was still fundamental.

Hence, newly bought slave Number 2 (adult male; former criminal) was a rather helpful specimen. He had a sturdy build and what's more was that he has no useful skills whatsoever and was thus, priced economically. He did not have a single ounce of magic power and so, the obedience spell worked finely on him. Not to mention that he contained a great dislike towards nobility and his attitude towards them was the very worst. Despite prescribing the strongest medicine and conducting radical experiments on him, my conscience didn't weigh on me one bit.

In any case, this round of experiments were a failure.

"The muscle strengthening medicine derived from Full-Moon Scopolia... even though the theory should be correct. Was its toxicity not attenuated sufficiently?"

Falling into a state of abnormal excitement, inability to discern things and the cloudiness of consciousness were observed.

I managed to find a prescription text from an old bookshop and by making references to it, I tried to make a medicine. However, after replacing the main component with a more potent medicinal herb, it didn't seem to go well.

"Rather than thinking about the expected effectiveness, the risk of side effects have risen too much. Should I do a full reevaluation?"

"Still, swapping to it a less poisonous variant would make it more expensive. Should I

employ adventurers to collect them for me? Instead of buying directly, this would help reduce the costs.”

As I grumbled on, Yuni drooped her shoulders disheartenedly.

“.....I beg for you forgiveness, master.”

“Hm? Why?”

“Yuni has been continuing her training but I am still not good enough to be of use.”

Also, she bowed her head down apologetically. Oh, so she has a cute side to her as well huh?

“You don’t really need to pay too much attention to that. The training program would be refined and polished annually. I anticipate another 5 or 6 years before you are combat ready.”

“Yes...”

I gave her the affirmation right from my mouth but from her appearance, it seems like she still has worries about it. Perhaps she associated the worst situation because of the next stage of the research — human experimentation that involved utilising slaves. More specifically, she was afraid that she would become a specimen for the human experiments.

Nevertheless, Yuni was a scarce talent that could be hardly found anywhere. I looked through the entire slave market and rarely saw someone who had her level of magic powers. Slaves who had such magic powers were attached with a price tag that only relatively high peerage holders or owners of small castles can afford, and these slaves were all elves too. It was really a godsend fortune that I was able to procure Yuni at that price.

Consequently,

“Rest assured, Yuni. I would not simply abuse someone of your calibre because that would be incredibly foolish.”

I made a very clear cut declaration, and it seems that her anxieties faded to some extent.

“Yes... yes, master-sama...”

Though I must say, this was a somewhat ominous sign. The small animal-like fear and braveness that arose in her were not feelings that would occur if one was loved caringly.

This release of what was on her mind, in short, implied that she was fearful of me. Even if I removed the fear she has of me with whatever reason or anything, there would not be any guarantee that she would put her live on the line for me. For example, if one day, someone who protects her, replacing my role, appears.

...It was a plausible situation. After all, I did say I wanted to give her the dangerous task of searching the ingredients that were necessary for alchemy. Actually, it was because of the direction of the progressive training that she could see that I was pushing her to be my helper. If one day, Yuni's dissatisfaction is not stifled or if some meddling person extends a helping hand because of pity... there were countless of possibilities if I just thought about it.

Of course, the obedience spell was currently active, though I did repeat several times that this was not an absolute measure to gain trust. For that reason, I need to bring her heart closer to my side.

I examined the possibility of using brainwashing magic or brain restructuring but it is not something of my league currently. To make it something that I could do would require more time. I have to prepare some kind of a plan.

“Master, what should we do with Number 2.”

Her voice brought me back to reality after being lost in my own thoughts. I can't be like this, brooding over things endlessly was one of my bad habits.

“Ahh, for now, please help me administer the fourteenth antidote. There are many many more experiments that I want to do with Number 2 after all. Have you memorised how to do it?”

“Umm, mix the water in, insert the catheter into his mouth and use the pump to pour it into the throat, right...?”

“Yes, yes. Be careful not to mistakenly insert it into the respiratory way.”

“Is an injection no good?”

“You know we are doing a clinical trial of a muscle strengthening medicine yes? In this situation, the bulging muscles would be a hindrance and would prevent the needle from entering.”

“.....Sorry.”

“Ahaha. You do not have to stress yourself out. Having doubts and raising questions are the signs of a good servant.”

I continued to guide her. I was pretending to be kind while thinking of more wiles to deeply cajole her into trusting me.



Another month's passing.

“Demon! You all are demons!”

“Ah—, alright alright. You are so noisy, could you please be quiet, Number 3. Ah, made that mistake again. ‘Shut up’”

“——Ughh! ———Ughhhh!!”

Infusing some magic into my order, the female slave was robbed of her voice promptly. The obedience spell was quite convenient. Truly, from the bottom of my heart, with just this alone, my life must have been rosy.

Incidentally, this female was a slave that I recently purchased. The effects and side effects varies between males and females. Just Number 2, who was a male, on the operating table wasn't enough.

“Yuni. Help me restrain Number 2-kun.”

“”Yes, master... ungh!”

Yuni held the unconscious Number 2-kun with both her arms and brought him to a

cell.

The sight of a child labouriously dragging an adult by the armpits was somewhat... surreal. Though I did know that she had gone through many trainings and she has built up quite some strength, seeing her lift another human that exceeds her own weight was still startling. In my previous world, moving unconscious people would be difficult even for adults. The muscular strength exhibited by Yuni was a commonly seen attribute of a fantasy world but it was still praiseworthy.

“Ah... ughh...”

It was very slight but the noise of Number 2-kun groaning reached my ears.

He became noticeably weaker in recent days. When I first bought him, having the vigour of a former criminal, he constantly spit vulgarities and even tried to lay his hands on Yuni. It was quite a troublesome matter. In the end, the obedience spell was revised to include another rule that the slaves of his master cannot be harmed as well. Well, thinking back upon it, it was a good learning experience.

However, he has became rather quiet as of late... rather than that, he started blabbering nonsense all the time. His movement capabilities have also declined to the extent where he required help or else he would not be able to move normally. And despite all that, due to the effects of the muscle strengthening medicine experiment, his body was still well-built, giving off a tragic out-of-place feeling.

Looks like we are approaching the limits, for this guy.

He should be dying soon. By none other than our experiment. He might be a former criminal but we were still killing a full-fledged living human being.

No, currently, Number 2-kun's mental and physical state has already decayed away. There was no hope of him returning to an ordinary lifestyle or recovering to his previous personality even if we released him from our experiment. Number 3-san who I made to shut up awhile ago would probably suffer the same fate.

Though, my heart was strangely unperturbed by these events. Even though I was conducting such cruel and evil things. No matter how much this country laws dictate that owners' of slaves can do whatever they want with them and will not be punished, as a human being myself, my conscience should have been tinged in guilt.

Towards my rhetorical question, something that resided my innermost depths laughed.

—So what? It says.

My goal was to become immortal. I felt it before I was reincarnated, the dying sensation of having your roots, branches and everything you were, robbed from you and turning into nothing. To escape that fate, I would do anything I can. That's why I absolutely have to devote myself to alchemy. That's why I have do countless of experiments. How many people would die because of it; it doesn't matter as long as I am able to evade death. doesn't it?

The snake that coiled inside my stomach, bragged aloud.

"The task of moving Number 2 is done."

Yuni's report broke my train of thoughts.

"Good work, Yuni. Hmm, let's have another mid-noon break today."

"!"

As I told her such, Yuni eyes gleamed dimly. The change in her expression was sparse but at least it proved that she wasn't without emotions. And due to that, though it was small, there was a chance that she would betray me.

What held her back were the obedience spell, the debt of saving of her life and also the whip of fear towards me. As of such, I have to insure myself by throwing sweets at her. Literally sweets.

Regarding the sugar from my previous world, humans already knew how to make it BCE (Before Common Era). It exists in this continent too but it was low in production and commanded a high price.

Still, I was an alchemist. As long as I have the proper equipment and that there were maple sap available in the nearby woods, I could make enough sugar that could cost an entire family's income. As one would expect, turning this cash-flow route into a stable source of income would be pretty intense but it could at least provide for some small change.

To make matters worst, the era in this world was similar to the middle centuries, and culinary remain largely undeveloped. Considering that, even though I have some knowledge of my previous world, I wasn't any confectioner so the most I can do is to provide refined sweets. Feels like cheating.

And children have a weak spot for sweet things. An uncontrollable weakness. This was an era when there were few entertainment that can distract people from stress and also that the lowest stratum of society were slaves. What would happen if these luxurious sweets could match the tastes of the royalty and the aristocrats? Naturally, it would be like a dream.

"Today... what shall we have, maybe donuts?"

".....What kind of food is that?"

"Simply speaking, it is a pastry made by frying uncooked dough covered with sugar. Ahh, which reminds me, we succeeded in cultivating yeast earlier. If we add that in before frying it, it would become much fluffier——"

She was unfazed by what I said but I could hear the sound of gulping. An honest kid. To gain the trust of a person, rather than pointing a sword, grabbing hold of one's stomach was much easier. At the same time, if one's tongue is satisfied, there wasn't a need to say anything.

...Though, this much was still lacking. In order to ensure that she doesn't disobey me, I have to make her ever more dependent on me, I have to discipline her more precisely. Looking back into history, there were many people who chose betrayal even after being rescued, being tied by chains of fear, having one's desires fulfilled or even if love was given.

I do not want to die.

Dying once was more than enough.

I do not want to despair.

I am going to live, I would live in the most amusing way possible.

For that end, the hard found game pieces that I possess, I would make sure they absolutely do not become traitorous towards me.

←Paragraph taken from Wikipedia. One morning in the winter of 194 BC, Emperor Hui went for a hunting trip and did not bring Liu Ruyi with him because the latter refused

to get out of bed. Lü Zhi's chance arrived, so she sent an assassin to force poisoned wine down Liu Ruyi's throat. The young prince was dead by the time Emperor Hui returned. Lü Zhi then had Concubine Qi killed in an inhumane manner: she had Qi's limbs chopped off, eyes gouged out, ears sliced off, forced her to drink a potion that made her mute, and thrown into a latrine. She called Qi a "human swine". Several days later, Emperor Hui was taken to view the "human swine" and was shocked to learn that it was Concubine Qi. He cried loudly and became ill for a long time. He requested to see his mother and said, "This is something done not by a human. As the empress dowager's son, I'll never be able to rule the empire." From then onward Emperor Hui indulged himself in carnal pleasures and ignored state affairs.

Chapter 2

My First Lady <Second Half>

A month passed.

“Master-sama. It is time to wake up.”

“Ug-ghh...”

As I lifted my swollen eyelids and sobered up, I could see a girl wearing a crude one-piece and a white apron looking down on me. Needless to say, she was Yuni.

Since she was learning etiquette from the maids of our residence, it wasn't farfetched to say she was apprenticing under the maids. Of course, her appearance was also appropriate, but as a slave, she had to consider the quality of her clothes. The Obeniel Family was of a considerable standing as a House of Earl. When one becomes a servant, even if one was among the ranks of a commoner, they could be assigned to someone close to an aristocrat or a lower ranked aristocrat's child. If one was a slave, due to their rank, it was common to see them being allowed to only wear clothing that were several ranks inferior.

“Morning, Yuni.”

“Good morning, master-sama.”

I brought my body to an upright position and exchanged morning greetings. It has been nearly half a year since I brought this child to the household. Could it be the results of her daily training? Yuni was gradually outgrowing her choice of words and the way she totters around like a child. It seems that she has been receptive and enthusiastic to the training by the servants that I borrowed from father.

She was moving in the right direction. Hammering the mould into her from the start would allow her to learn to behave and obey others slowly. It would make it easy to suppress her rebellious spirit if she possesses one. Habits that are picked up by the body cannot be easily forgotten. If I trained her to enjoy lowering her head and do her

best for me, I can look forward to her having a greater loyalty towards me when she grows up.

I stretched my arms out as I got up.

“I stayed up too late yesterday... got my hands onto a piece of interesting information and had to finish it no matter what.”

“Please have some self-love. If you hurt your health... you are no longer a child.”

“That’s true. Before attaining my long-cherished dream of immortality, I cannot afford to die young.”

I started changing my clothes while engaging in trivial talk. Yuni bravely stripped off my pyjamas and helped me put on my shirt. Having a younger girl assist in my change of clothes did leave me with a bit of embarrassment but it was the duty of the aristocrats to allow the servants to help out in ordinary day-to-day affairs like this.

Indeed, it must be linked to creating employment but Yuni was ultimately an unpaid slave. This wasn’t good for the economy but, well, I can think of this as part of nurturing a heart for service.

“Hearing as you have obtained new information, would there be a change in today’s schedule?”

After changing, she asked me.

Why would I change my plans for today after obtaining information? It’s obviously because I would be conducting new experiments.

However, it wasn’t the case this time.

“Mm—, deciphering the old text would take some time. For the meantime, we shall continue with the current experiment.”

“Yes, certainly. Then I shall make the necessary preparations.”

Yuni said, as she lowered her head in a natural motion. Her gestures when giving respects were starting to look decent. Being trained by professionals really did make her learn quickly. As I smiled fondly at her progressive growth, I thought that today would be a good day.



Half a year passed.

“Guhah!?”

Thrusting forcefully a wooden pole used for training into his solar plexus, the man's bushy area collapsed. As always, Yuni looked down with not a single hint of emotion even though she completed the achievement of beating down an adult alone with her child-like body.

One year has passed since the training programme to elevate her physical potential started. Said man was a first-generation knight, who once participated in a war and attained himself a meritorious deed, but this was the outcome.

This grown up man was defeated by a seven year old (guessing) girl, furthermore, he was given the initiation attack. No no, it was likely that she would become scarier than this.

“Thank you very much for the guidance today as always.”

“W-What guidance...”

With quivering feet like that of a newborn fawn, the knight took close to a full minute to recover his footing. He must be enduring Yuni's single blow to a similar extent.

After all, her strength has been augmented thanks to medicine I concocted. It was a medicine that was discovered with great difficulty. It would not inhibit a person's skeletal growth as it does not increase the quantity of muscles but heightens the quality of the muscles. It took no less than the pointless deaths of five slaves. All of them were the cheapest; if they had no worthy skills, the slaves could even be cheaper than toys or sweets, but still, it was undesirable due to the time wasted on handling their disposals. There was this once when father found fault with my cremation of a corpse. He reprimanded me severely and brought me all the way to a church to be preached to.

However, it did bore results and it made Yuni's physical capabilities improve to a large extent. If she were able to fight like this at 7 years old, then she might be able to handle the job of searching materials I need much earlier than expected.

Chuckling to myself as I pictured a bright future, a knight serving my family faced me with an austere expression.

“Young master... Please let this girl’s opponent off for today”

This voice sounded different from pain and felt like the trembling of something instead.

“Yes? Why?”

“Honestly, there is nothing more that I can teach above this. Also, if this continues everyday, my body will not hold.”

As he said, he pointed out to his stomach and wrists that had been repeatedly beaten. There were also countless of bruises on his face. Certainly, Yuni has grown much stronger than he was now. It was at a point where nothing much can be learnt from this man. Furthermore, he even allowed a child to reach all the way to his solar plexus; he has lost all of face of a knight. Considering that carefully, it should be about time to round things up.

Well, I heard that he became a first generation knight not because of his outstanding services in war but rather, because of his value as a personal valet. I did not know what was the average fighting capability for combatants but I am quite confident he wasn’t high up in the hierarchy. It might already be time that Yuni requires a much higher level teaching material.

I nodded in assent and the man scuttled off.

“Now then, what shall we do from tomorrow? Maybe I should employ an adventurer to teach magic or searching skills?”

“.....Is that okay? With that, the money reserved to purchase an experimental tables and other materials —”

Ostensibly, Yuni said so admirably. Though her concerns were unnecessary.

“If you reach a competent level quickly, we can recover all that losses later. I rather you reach that point earlier; we would gain much more eventually by doing this.”

Acquiring raw materials would cost money since we would have to specially buy it from people. If we can collect these materials ourselves, the cost in that field would practically become zero.

“Well, until we make the arrangements for the new teacher, you shall be going monster hunting in the outskirts. Can you do that?”

“Yes. The likes of goblins which often appear near the town would not be any trouble. I have confidence in that.”

Yuni declared coolly. Actually, she was the one who was beating all the monsters that we came across in these plains. The knight that I borrowed earlier helped us out only at the start for approximately a month. She was capable of exploring the nearby forest but I do not know if something might happen in a real battle. It was possible that she meets a large flock of enemies at one go or fight a series of battles and become fatigued or injured in the process, thus, suffer an embarrassing defeat. To genuinely do exploration, it should be more than enough to have another two to three more years of training.

Although things may look this way, I did push forward the timeline from my initial plan. This was due to her advancing quickly, surpassing my expectations.

I am in no rush. Layering diligence over diligence, I proceeded carefully. It was because there was nobody else with her degree of talent.



Three years passed.

“The opponent were also adventurers and the result was as expected. Even though it was Yuni, you did not go injury free.”

I said to the her with a body inflicted with injuries here and there while treating her injuries personally.

Yuni would be able to use recovery magic to heal herself if it was just this much, but leaving behind any kind of scar would be troublesome in the future. In that aspect, I can happily brag that I am second to none in terms of leaving no scars after treatment. After all, I was the one who healed those cruel and vile injuries. There were no reasons

why I couldn't treat those battle injuries now.

"...I have caused you trouble."

"No no, I was the one who requested you to do this unreasonable job. You shouldn't be apologising."

I consoled her, whose facial expression remained unmoved as she lowered her head. No matter how much time passes, she hardly shows any emotions but that was due to the way she had socialised for many years. I could at least see that the bottom of her heart was, in any case, disheartened.

"At any rate, those teachers were bothersome... They were trying to snatch Yuni away from me."

"Yes. If they weren't planning that, I was thinking I should have been able graduate with a more appropriate step."

"Good grief," I let out a sigh of exasperation as I nodded.

The ones who inflicted injuries on Yuni were her masters. They were basically, people not from the residence who were giving her guidance. However, somehow, it seemed like they suspected me of conducting human experiments. With that as their force for persuasion, they suggested that they take custody of her since I may turn to her next for the experiments.

She might be said to be a slave of a noble but she was still a child. If there was a negotiation with the owner, it should be possible to buy her out of her contract with money, they said.

If something like that was done, I would not be able to go against the wishes of my Father who was the head of family. Because, even at the best of times, I was devoting myself to alchemy research which was a deviation from what he wanted of me. He would definitely let Yuni go without a shred of hesitation.

Naturally, they haven't told me all of this directly. It was in the middle of her training, when they casually devised plans for Yuni.

And, when I heard about the betrayal from her, without a moment's delay, I ordered for an assassination. If she didn't want to do it, I was considering the use of the

subordination magic but, she didn't refuse. She went to kill her teachers, whom she owe a debt of gratitude to and whom showed affection for her, without any second thoughts. I was the one who brought her up like that but frankly, she was one terrifying child.

They were both adventurers who made a name for themselves with just their skills alone but not for a single moment would they have thought that the person they were trying to save, would be the very person who killed them. Since she was the so-called solo adventurer who doesn't form parties, if it was just one of them at a time, just Yuni, a budding fighter, alone was more than enough to send them to their conclusions. The female magician that was teaching her magic was ended by a single stab on her back while unaware. The bigger problem was the male hermit —a scout who was a professional at picking locks— who was teaching her the essential searching skills. As expected of his skills as a scout, I heard he astutely sensed her killing intent and retaliated with ferocity.

In the end, the most he could do was deal a few cuts to her. It was some good luck that it didn't end up with him fleeing. From Yuni's report, to be extra cautious, not only did she deliver the final blow to him, she also buried him. There was also the fear in this world where the dead revives as an undead. Therefore, she had to bury them in a graveyard where memorial services were conducted regularly. Crushing the corpse can fully ensure that they could never become zombies or skeletons, however, there was the danger that they became ghosts if they were overly consumed by hatred. There were both merits and demerits in this so-called fantasy world. To ensure that a dead man tell no tales, another light push was needed.

Incidentally, among the slaves who were spent by the experiments and who were cremated, there were a few that did become ghosts. Still, after exorcising them with magic, the same individual can never emerge as a ghost again. Surely, as their soul dissipates, they feel the same as I did before I reincarnated.

Leaving that topic aside,

“Graduation, huh. While it was true she took them by surprise, she was at a level where she could defeat both of her masters. This should be a suitable time for Yuni to head out for exploration.”

“.....May I have your permission?”

Yuni lifted her head up and her eyes were fixed at me as she gazed at me. It was the

same expression when I was praising her. She behaved the same way when she was given sweets or equipments. Did she really want to go adventuring that much?

After completing most of the treatment, I took a seat and continued my suggestion.

"You are already much better and I wouldn't have to pay for a home tutor. The expenses can be used for new experiments. If you are able to do it, by all means, I would want to go with that plan too."

"T... thank you, master-sama!"

Suddenly, with a sound of her clothes fluttering, Yuni prostrated herself on the floor.

"Definitely... definitely, I swear I will become more useful than ever before!"

".....Err, mm."

That was startling.

She was always the quiet child, so I never expected that she would raise her voice as though she added an exclamation mark to the end of her sentence.

It appeared that she noticed that I was taken aback. She brought her head, that was elevated for an instant, back down.

".....I have acted disgracefully. Please forgive me."

"No, I am not angry. Also, you do not have to kneel down before me in such a grandiose manner. It's not like others are looking over here.... C'mon, stand up, stand up."

I let out a small sigh as I forgave her.

I wonder if it is because of the servants whom I entrusted the learning of manners to were strict, some of her gestures when giving gratitude or apology were exaggerated. Certainly, since slaves were a lower class than that of commoners who were beneath that of nobles — the lowest of the lowest class, it was correct to behave obsequiously. That was the common sense of this world. Although, seeing someone do this everyday would be suffocating for me instead. I do desire an overflowing heart of loyalty, but the last drop makes the cup runs over. I want her to be more fun.

Once I ascertained with my own eyes that Yuni had stood up, I changed the topic.

“Well, I would be happy to see an enthusiastic Yuni. That’s how it is. From now on, we need to face towards Yuni’s adventurer debut and should make preparations for it. Let’s register at the guild in the start of the next month.”

They were troublesome, but necessary formalities.

If one becomes an adventurer, he or she would be able to enter dangerous areas unallowed for ordinary people. So far as it goes, it seems that there are unlicensed adventurers who skip registering with the guild — either because they are some shady lot who have a serious previous conviction record, or are active criminals — ignoring standard procedures. Nevertheless, those were the root of superfluous quarrels. Being found out and getting fined was just the start of it. Coming across official adventurers while at the exploration destination might end up in a squabble, and there was also the fear that they might be accused of illegal activities like poaching. In the case of being found guilty of committing unpardonable evil deeds, one could be made the target of a subjugation just like monsters. Such troubles are not of my liking, so I would make sure to register.

“For now, let’s get the exact types of equipment ready. Do you have any special requests? The one using them would be Yuni, hence, do not hold back and give me your opinions.”

“Then, master-sama —”

After being prompted to speak at ease, she talked, but somehow with a tendency to hesitate.

“How about something like a rugged combat-ready maid uniform?”

...

Huh, what was that again?

“.....Maid uniform?”

I doubted my ears instinctively and asked her to repeat herself. In response, she nodded.

“A maid uniform.”

In any case, my hearing was normal.

She was anxiously avoiding eye contact with me, but still, that was what she said.

Exactly where and how did she come up with that kind of request I wonder. True, she was used to wearing the maid uniform and moving in them would likely be easier for her. Be that as it may, does she have the intent to wear that out while adventuring?

Perhaps this was some first rate joke by Yuni. As I considered, she stared at me earnestly.

“.....That may not do?”

Her pair of upturned eyes looked uneasy as she asked me.

This kid is serious about it. I have confidence in that.

No, maybe she got a shock from personally taking care of her own teachers and was in a state of confusion? It left a strong unease in her, but when I was giving her treatment, I made sure to check her vitals. Her pulse and perspiration were both normal. Therefore, I could unmistakably declare that she was sane.

Thoughtlessly, I placed my hand on her forehead. I hardly troubled Yuni. She was always following my instructions. I didn't have to use the magic on the collar or the other measures that prevents rebellion. Moreover, what you see was all the result of training. She has by far, outstripped my expectations. Such an excellent child, where and how did I make a blunder, that she would answer with “Maid uniform” when asked what she wanted for her equipment.

As I remained baffled, I said.

“.....Well, I'll handle it.”

I am sure my face was mostly cramping up.

While I replied with an unusual answer, I was the one who started this topic. Furthermore, this request was made strongly by a child that barely asks anything for herself. It wasn't something that couldn't be done, so if this much was able to satisfy her demands, it would be considered a relatively cheap business. I decided to think this way.

As expected, she reciprocated with a deep bow.

“For listening to my impertinent request with all ears, I am immensely thankful.... I

pledge to become ever more motivated.”

“Oh, yeah.... Do your best.”

This was my first time saying something like that. And I answered while chasing more thoughts.

Maid uniform, huh... If I tailored the white alice band — the one that is worn on the head — or the apron, as an equipment, it should come out as something that can withstand fights and adventuring. Above all, it was the same kind of clothing that she wore on a daily basis, hence it can also be said to have a high concealability in her everyday life. With that line of thought, it wasn't a bad suggestion to make such an equipment for Yuni.

Don't tell me she made that choice with that in mind?
I drew up a plan in the back of my mind while contemplating.



Two years passed.

“—Now then, the final test. Kill yourself with what you are holding.”

Immediately after giving my orders, the slaves that were holding onto the ends of the rope with both hands, pulled and tightened it without any hesitation. Even though it was wrapped around their own necks.

“Guh, ugh...”

Sounds resembling a frog being strangled to death by a snake arose.

Having one's neck tightened was agonising. Breathing would be blocked off and even blood flow would be obstructed until consciousness was lost. At the end of a few minutes of struggling, the slackened lower half of the body would discharge feces and piss, as they die. Among the methods to commit suicide, I suppose it was the lowest of the lowest. Under actual conditions, there were people who writhed in pain while having their necks hanged, causing the rope to snap. Much less to say using the strength of hands to suicide, if there wasn't a sufficient amount of determination, it couldn't be pulled off.

However, the slaves that have been ordered by me did not waver in their arms' strength, continuing to kill themselves with the rope. Because I used the subordination magic? Nope, wrong.

"Yuni, has the magic activated?"

"No. Both emission of magic and magical techniques have not been detected."

"Alright, then there are no problems."

At the same time when I nodded with satisfaction, the test subjects, the slaves, trembled and collapsed on the operating table. And then, a horrid stench that induces one to pinch their nose enshrouded the underground lab.

They have died. Not by coercion from magic; from the start to the end, it was only verbal instructions.

"The subjects' vital signs are confirmed to have stopped. The experiment is a success."

Yuni's soft voice announced the great progress of my research. I was in the mood to laugh out loud and do a small dance, but I paused. Because of the things that leaked out in the final moments on the operating table, it wasn't that big of a deal but it wasn't an environment in which I wanted to breathe in deeply.

".....That took a long time. That is to realise complete control over a person through brainwashing."

That's right, brainwashing.

As I have mentioned countless of times, the collar on the slaves that forces them to submit to me was something that could be deactivated by their magic. In order to completely overcome that, there was a need to restructure from their brains to obey me. Opening their heads with a scalpel, tampering with their brains, to the very end, all the methods used to take away their will to betray were surgical, or it could thought of as embedding the thoughts of obedience. Someone from somewhere once did used this method to mar Yuni's face, and I later put the same method to practical use when treating Yuni. The parts that were desired were temporarily destroyed and regenerated to a desired shape.

The crux of this method was that it isn't possible to deactivate the brainwashing by magic. After all, the brain of the subject after the operation would be healthy, so recovery magic will not be able to heal it. The only way to treat it might be to temporarily destroy the part of the brain that creates the effect of brainwashing, and then healing it to its original form. This means that the same operation has to be repeated.

Even if someone tries to dispel brainwashing magic, it wasn't like I was controlling them by magic, hence, even the target for the magic was lacking. For argument's sake, there might be a loophole and there might be a risk that the real brainwashing magic could overwrite the controlling rights... but such a brainwashing magic user does not exist and therefore, I did not have to consider how to cope with this fatal magical attack and could devote myself to research.

Most importantly, it was the best measure to prevent betrayal that I wished for now.

“Congratulations, master-sama.”

Yuni reverently lowered her head, congratulating me on the success of the experiment. For no apparent reason, her cheeks were blushing faintly. Possibly, the joy she was experiencing was much greater than mine.

“By receiving this procedure, master-sama’s slaves can become more idealistic yes...” Somehow, she murmured together with a feverish sigh. The reason for it was as she have said.

The her from before, seemed to have been greatly dissatisfied with how I constantly drew a line with my actions.

From day one of obtaining Yuni, I have been doubtful of the power of the collar to make the slaves submit to me. Yuni’s magic was above average, and I prescribed miracle drugs of which were gotten from experiments, further boosting her powers. That’s why even till today, I interact with her while always being on alert for hints of betrayal. Even during the experiments, mealtimes, and sleeptime too. From time to time, I would hand down some orders restricting some specific actions, also I would never let go of my protection equipment when sleeping... well, such kind of things have been going on the whole time.

From the time I bought her, I have been teaching her to have loyalty, and yet, everyday I continue to be sceptical of it. If it was me instead, just one day would be enough for

me to throw in the towel. To date, the other slaves that have been purchased with the same motive as Yuni, only except the person herself, the other useful slaves who could not sustain, ended up dead. Separating them into categories, 20 percent of them killed themselves, 10 percent broke down mentally, and the remaining 70 percent secretly planned to rebel so I sent them to their ends. All of them were capable with magic and in their own ways, were expensive slaves. Nothing beats such wastefulness.

And thus, even for her who has endured such a lifestyle without a word of complain, lately, she leaked out them like tears falling.

“Please, allow me to become a more complete slave.”

She said.

I committed to memory this feeling of being so overwhelmingly happy that I wanted to jump out in joy when I heard those words. It was the instance in which the many years of education have yielded fruit. I am sure Helen Keller’s teacher, Sulluvan, felt the same as I am now, in that moment when Helen spoke of the word, “Water”.

Of course, there was a chance that this was cajolery in order to get my guard down, so for now, I was trying to recover my focus.

For that reason, while remaining unperturbed and vigilant, I said.

“Hmm, this is no more than securing some early success. The same operation on Yuni would have to take more examples I believe?”

“.....Yes. I understand, master-sama.”

Yuni faintly lowered her brows. Not sure if it was because she was always expressionless and that I am not used to it, but I could see the clear disappointment on her face. That this might just be for appearances, was among the realm of possibility too though.

“If that is the case, I have one suggestion.”

“Hm, what is it?”

She said while pulling out her handkerchief.

"For next time, before entering this final test, may I ask that the subjects put on diapers?"

"Ah."

Unwittingly, my mouth was left agape — the stench that was barging in made me feel sick. I grew accustomed to some degree of stink from repeating human experiments, but it was not like I could completely eliminate the unpleasantness.

Leaving that aside, it is true that each time the same thing was done, the lab would become contaminated and for that, I seek your forgiveness. Doing experiments here was tough for me, and for Yuni who has to handle the cleaning up afterwards, it must have been much harder on her.

"Mother of god! Had I not realised about that thing!?"

Filled with regret and self-loathing, I brought my arms to my head. Since the operating table was designed for cases when there was a loss in body function, things like diapers were always kept in reserve. To think that I would have clean forgotten about it!

Such a miserable silly mistake thinned down my joy in achieving experimental success.

".....I only realised just earlier too."

Yuni said so in an attempt to console me.

Seriously, I had what number of years of experimentation under my belt, and yet I failed to notice something this simple.

However, well, this was also a good opportunity to fix my lax mood.

"Lights are usually followed by shadows huh... and it took us great pains to get to this final stage of the experiment too. After clearing things up, we shall have to rethink if there are any other problems."

"I understand."

After finishing up with the tremendous cleaning that we were both reluctant to do, we

reexamined the problem areas of the experiment anew.

There were no other problems found.



One month passed.

“Don’t c-come... do not come! I’ll do anything so please don’t come near me! G-get out!!”

“Haah... I got it, just getting out is good right?”

In an attempt to quell the screaming from behind, I got out of the room.
Even after I closed the door, I could still hear ceaseless shrieking from inside.

Father has been always acting like this as of late. Every time he saw my face, he would expel a strange voice. It looks like he has finally lost it. Despite being ridden with an illness, he wouldn’t even let me conduct a medical examination on him.

Secluding himself to his bedroom, there was no way anyone could have met him unless they expressly made a visit. I wonder if it could be considered a blessing. If we were at our meal area and he was screaming like that, it would be out of this world.

“How pitiful.”

That voice emanated from my brother, Lynes Strein Obeniel. It appears that he had been watching from outside the room.

Having entered adulthood, his manliness has all the more surfaced, just like a noble youth with a fair complexion straight out from a picturebook. The only thing was that he has been recently furrowing his brows all the time, creating an unapproachable aura which was a fly in the ointment.

“Yes, really. If he could at least calm down, I am sure he would be able to receive treatment from the church.”

At how I lamented at father’s condition, brother laughed scornfully.

“Who I was referring to was you.”

“Eh, me? Why?”

As I blinked my eyes at those unexpected words, he sighed back at me in a flaunting manner. What the heck was he trying to do.

“You do not understand? Apart from entering a lowly business, you sullied our family’s social status, and finally, you have even ran out of father’s favour. What else can we call that but pitiful?”

It appears that he was speaking with sarcasm. From the start, we weren’t close brothers but a few years back, whenever I saw him, he was like this. Whenever he sees a human face, he would treat it as though he came across a cockroach and father would make a fuss equal in intensity. In recent times, however, I could only feel hatred from the way brother looks at me.

“Yes, I see. That is one way to look at it.”

There was not a single worth in seriously accompanying in this competition. I nodded with calmness.

Now that he mentioned it, it was tragic. I, who have been pampered by father since I was a child, had become a target of animosity by him. It was certainly disaster for a child who has lost the love from his parent.

In any case, father wasn’t pleased with my continuous killing of slaves on the operating table.

Why that was so was odd. In this country, it should be the case that not a single hoot will be given no matter how many slaves were killed, if they were your own property. In order to ensure that my research could continue safely, I made sure to check whether there was anything that was considered against the regulations beforehand. Furthermore, whether it was father or brother, it wasn’t once or just twice when they killed slaves who has their disfavour. And so, why am I the only one who was reproached for it? I cannot understand at all. No doubt I was ‘consuming’ them at too fast a pace, but was it something worth scolding over?

Well, I couldn’t be bothered with what father thinks. As long as it does not pose any demerits to me, I couldn’t care less if I was loved or hated. Not only were my research

funds already covered by the sale of potions, as an adventurer, Yuni could earn an income. Therefore, I had no need for a small allowance.

The problem was at the very end of losing his mind, he excluded me from inheritance, but even if I was carrying out a crime — carrying out but not yet exposed — it wasn't considered impolite in terms of social etiquette. In fact, it was not like I took part in social life. Yet, father considered that there was no law in what I did.

Perhaps uninterested in my response, brother twitched his brows and stiffened his cheeks.

“.....Hmph. It looks like it's impossible for you to comprehend.”

“Maybe. So, is that all you have to say? If that is so, I would like to be excused.”

I turned around while saying. Honestly, having a conversation with brother was tiring. Every single time we met, all he had to offer was either sarcasm or orders for me to stop my research. Even though I would have to die some day if the immortality research couldn't be completed. Does this person see no problem in my death?

There was no meaning in endlessly continuing a conversation which no end could be seen. What I hated most after dying, was pointlessness.

Just as I was about to walk back to the lab,

“Speaking of which, Talese —”

Obstinately, brother called out to me again.

“Where is that slave of yours? For some time now, I haven't seen that slave.”

The person he was asking for was likely to be Yuni. All my slaves existed for the laboratory table. Generally, they died due to the effects of the experiment, or they were dealt with because I had to prevent information leak. That's why, when he referred to a slave by “that slave”, it would mean the long-lived her.

“What is it, elder brother. Are you interested in Yuni? Even if you desire her, I will not give her to you.”

Supposing that this country's king tells me to hand her over, I would have to say no. Having costed me a colossal amount of time and money, I have finally brought her to a satisfactory level. I have no intention to pass her over to a bunch of people who do not even know the alphabet "A" in "Alchemy". All the more for this fella whom I know so very well.

Turning my head over my shoulders to look, brother was grimacing in an extremely vexed manner.

"A slave that is the same kind as you, getting tainted by the stink of intestines, I would have to asked to be excused from that. I was simply curious."

What a rude thing to say. We are always watching out for our hygiene. For me and for her as my helper, we were not imbeciles who couldn't clean ourselves and remove the filthy stink. Not only do we use the bath frequently, we make sure to change our clothes too. In terms of maintaining the cleanliness of slaves, I dare say we are the best in the capital — no, the entire world.

As you know, bacterias are the source of experiments going awry. Regarding sterilisation and disinfection, I obsess over it like how I deal with corpses. I know the smell of the disinfectant could be said to be strong, but describing it as an intestinal stink was really out of question.

Brother made a slightly pleased expression towards my faintly sullen look.

"—I thought, possibly, that you have finally sacrificed that girl to your experiments."

And now he was being more sarcastic. Saying this would be mean, but I couldn't contain my laughter at his statement. Use Yuni in the experiments? From the day I bought her, I have always been doing so. Even now, I am doing *that*.

"I was just about to go and meet her... So then, my apologies."

Putting an end to this fruitless and unproductive conversation, I hurried to the underground basement.

Good grief, the long awaited day and this messed up thing happens. Despite this being the day when she finally clears the first stage.

Well, whatever. The jeers from these people who can't understand was as good as

background noise. Rather than be preoccupied with them, I might as well speed up the procedures.

Because once this is done, I can finally complete my first pawn at long last.

Laid down above the basement's operating table, she was sleeping.

The anaesthesia was adequately showing its effect. The operation will soon be finishing. The cut from opening the head has already closed and her hair looked better than ever before.

“.....You've worked hard, Yuni.”

I muttered while stroking her hair unconsciously.

A flood of emotions and thoughts weighed on my chest. In the span of six years, she was my prided slave that met my expectations, received training and continued to pile up accomplishments. The day when she would become more or less complete has come. There was no way I felt nothing about this.

She, who had her eyes shut while in a tranquil slumber, looked as beautiful as a princess from a fairytale. That was how I sincerely felt.

She had long eyelashes that decorated her closed eyelids and a straight nose that was well-shaped. In spite of losing some colour from her lips due to lost of blood from the anaesthesia, her lips still boasted of an elegance that gives the impression of petals.

A top rate sculptor would be able to perceive the final form of his work from the gradations of a raw stone, but if that was true, I don't think I could reach great success on that path. This was because I wasn't able to imagine six years ago, that she would transform from a broken body and shattered soul discarded at a slave market to being a beauty today. Even after I healed her, I remember being deeply awestruck by the gap before and after the operation, but the her of now who has experienced growth leaves a far deeper impression than ever before. I'm sure, as she becomes an adult from now on, she would probably become more beautiful.

And I know that underneath the beautiful mould, a more profound functional beauty is lying dormant. I knew the strength and sharpness of a lunge of a sword from this

slender arm. The speed and elasticity of those legs when they were dashing on the ground. Skills to conceal one's presence and to discern the enemy's presence. The many many stockpiled skills and knowledge. The extent of her magical power, which was the reason why I picked her, was such that even as she sleeps, the faint magical power leaking from her was enough to overwhelm me.

Above all, the fact that all of this exists for the sake of me and acts for the sake of me was wonderful.

From this round of operation, Yuni lost the element to disobey me. That portion that carries such a thing has completely disappeared from her heart. Literally, word for word, her everything has become mine.

“Fufufu...”

Reflexively, my cheeks felt slackened. It was a feeling like I held on to all the treasures of the world.

For my immortality research, the first step was just to obtain a supporter that would absolutely not betray me and yet, it felt this fulfilling. If the time comes when I achieve my long cherished desire, I wonder how much exhilaration I would savour?

Ahh, I wonder if this child would wake up early. There were countless of things I wanted to talk about. I wanted to talk about the next research and the next experiment with Yuni as early as possible.

I suppressed my stray emotions. Undoing the anaesthesia and forcefully waking her up was an easy matter. However, watching her doze off calmly like this, creates a surging emotion that makes me want to, as much as possible, allow her to wake up in the most natural and most comfortable way. It was because I made her work thoroughly hard up to now and I would have her work even harder for me from now on. I want to bestow at least this much kindness.

As I was thinking,

“Mnn...”

Yuni's eyelids quivered, and opened slightly.

Her awakening was very much earlier than expected. Could this be because of her

increasing resistance to the anaesthesia?

The once vacant jade green eyes of hers became focused, regaining an emerald glimmer.

A cool and clear awakening that reminds one of the blooming of morning glories. I greeted her while caught up in the moment.

“Morning, Yuni.”

“.....Good morning, master-sama.”

——And four years passed.

Chapter 3

Adventures of the Snake <Domestic Arc>

At a tavern, in the capital Brosenul — Testimony of a former retainer from the Obeniel Earl Family

The High Court of Justice is really full of free time, huh. As you see, I am just another drunkard. Something like the dirt that emerges when you hit something, or like the tab at the tavern. Gahahaha.

Yeah, it is as you say. Even though I look like this, back in the past I was given the title of First Generation Knight. I was unstoppable, they said. Thanks to that, there was a little brawl at the tavern... and that was how I returned to being a good-for-nothing commoner.

So, uhh, what do you want to ask me about? You will be treating me for tonight, right? In return, I will answer anything you ask.

...Obeniel? You are asking about the succession matter in the Obeniel Family?

...

Ha, hahahaa!

I'll be lost for words if you are joking with me. Everything at that house is going without a hitch, since the eldest son inherited the position of family head without a problem. If you're poking at that, you are just wasting your time, uh huh.

Or could it be that? What they call political tussling between bigwigs above the clouds? Royal court factional disputes? If that was the case, it would have been tough on the young master. That the stomach would be felt when there was no pain, and that he would be under house arrest until the succession finished.

Oh, right. Indeed, I worked for their family. That I was rewarded for my long years of service, decorated as a knight and honoured was also thanks to the master-sama — the previous generation head of family, who had passed away recently. Well, at the

very end, he ruined himself, and the person who kicked off sand with their hindlegs towards his kindness was none other than me.

That being said. I myself am deeply indebted towards that family. That's why, even if you slit my throat, I won't be saying a bunch of half-truths that would trouble them.

Eh? I am mistaken? Not the tug of war between aristocrats? Something that personally interests you?

...Mister, I am not going to be saying nasty stuff. Creating smoke where there is no fire will earn me not a single copper coin. In this world, yeah, each and every one of us know that there is no point in going against the flow. Anything but being a nuisance to others. That is where I draw the line.

So, what is it that you are curious about? I have already drank the alcohol, er, rather, the ship has sailed. I'll listen to your questions instead of the other things going on in the tavern.

You're saying that the succession of the household by the eldest son went too smoothly? Why instead of a succession dispute, the other side, the second son backed down so easily?

...What, that's it?

The residence I was in back then, how much do I know about that second son or whatever young master?

Uh-huh? He was child prodigy who studied alchemy on his own in spite of his young age, a shrewd fella who sold in bulk the potions he concocted on his own and was also the prodigy that the neighbouring country's magic academy invited. Surely, just by hearing this, others have said that he was more suitable to succeed the family instead of the mediocre elder brother. Hahahaa!

Still, well. Shall we look at it from another perspective? That guy, how useful would he be if he was the head of the Earl Family, would ya say?

I don't wanna badmouth the former master's son but an alchemist is, after all, just a vulgar fraudster. From dubious prescriptions that cannot be distinguished between poison or medicine, to tall tales of transmuting lead to gold, and last but not least, immortality too! There must be a limit to big talk. There is no way a parent would want

to pass the role of family head to a child who wears such a hat. From what I heard, that master-sama absolutely refused to drink the medicine his son prepared even on his deathbed. Well, that was the extent of it.

Even peddling potions in the city isn't acceptable. Isn't that right? For the big shots, it isn't their job to do trade. Their job should be making their subordinates do trade. They aren't allowed to put on the shoes of others.

To begin with, he spent only a year abroad at the acclaimed Academy before getting expelled? What in the world was he guilty of...?

Yes, I have no idea what happened over there. I'm sure you'll just need to do a bit of sniffing to find out, but young master Talese — the second son in question — before entering the Academy, he gave the knights the sack.

You should be able to understand from this much right? From the start, he wasn't a suitable vessel to inherit the Earl Family. Hence, he wasn't a fella that would carry the entire family on his shoulders. Even with nobody running the show, it wasn't like the family would collapse and disperse. Therefore, that was how the elder son became the head of family with little resistance.

Is that enough for you? You get it now? That the young master did not become the family head was completely something he brought on himself. There was not one bit of the "plot" that could be extolled at a cheap opera.

...Yeah. Had that eerie brat inherited the Obeniel Family, it wouldn't be strange if the entire Family went downhill.

...Everything was just about to come to an end too.

...This way, it is good as it is.

Huh? Whaddya say?

You are asking me how I feel about that young master?

Heh, hehehe...

You'll be hearing some unpleasant stuff, mister.

Ahh, that's right... It seems like tonight's alcohol expenses is going into this sickening conversation, but this must be what they call a confession. Suppressing everything in the heart alone is, in any case, this way... holding back is no good. Spilling out everything can be some fun, yup.

I was afraid. No, wrong. Even now, I am afraid.

You ask if he was that violent of a child? Wrong, you are mistaken. Just that one thing, just that alone is kinda good...

It's the complete opposite. He was really a calm child. I have never once seen him lift his hand against the servants. Even in selfishness, I hardly remember him saying things like that, except when it had to do with his expensive hobby of alchemy. I do recall him asking for allowance in advance a few times, but if the previous head told him off strongly, he would back off docilely. Yes, him starting the sale of potions was also because he needed another source of funds apart from his allowance.

Ya know, after mullin' over it a tad bit, doesn't it feel disgusting? Aristocratic children, no matter how well-bred and disciplined they are, usually cannot shut out their dislikes and selfishness. On the contrary, I have one or two memories that hint towards some kinda ambition in 'im. That is, as though he was an adult in the body of a child, he was good at being obedient. To the last, the only selfishness that stuck through was that he wanted to continue his alchemy research. That was the only thing he would never back down on. More than anything else, just that alone...

What is it? You think he is just like any other obedient child if that is all?

Yes, let's see... If that was all there was, I would have settled with that conclusion too.

Though, if you knew what happened, yeah? Thinking back upon it, I can only feel that his usual behaviour was incredibly eerie.

At first it was just weird... back when that young master bought his first slave. Yes, yes, as you know, he was brilliant since his toddler days, but still he never once took the stance of someone who stood above others. Yes, as the head of family said, it was a chance. If I remember correctly, that was when that guy — pardon me, when the young master was around eight years old. He was still a child and if he properly taught, he should've been able to wash his hands from the likes of alchemy — that might be what was on his mind then. At that time, the one acting as both attendant and bodyguard to him was me.

Though it was an aristocrat buying a slave, he was still a child. He wouldn't be forking out a large sum. Therefore, he rummaged through the slaves in order of price, from

the lowest.

...The slave that the young master chose was in an extremely severe condition. From behind, I could tell that she was a wee lass. The seller must have been a crazy despicable fella. Her face was beaten and swollen, her consciousness cloudy as she stood on the brink of death. A wretched state. What I meant by "from behind" was that, as long as her injuries weren't treated, I couldn't tell if she was male or female. In all likeliness, her parents must have incurred the wrath of somebody, and because of that, she was specifically tormented, and despite that, she barely managed to survive, hence, instead of killing and throwing her away, she was sold off to the slave market. Right, she was definitely wasn't fit for sale. After all, she was a child and a lass at that. Selling her with that kind of motive, her spirit musta been shattered, yea? Assuming she was treated, she would probably bear conspicuous scars thereafter, and let's not forget it was still questionable if she would live after receiving treatment. That was the kind of situation she was in.

Yes, he bought that slave. He was deep in thought for a moment, but he came down to a firm decision. In any case, it seemed that she wielded magical powers. Furthermore, she was an unbelievably superior good in such a cheap slave market. Surely they thought she couldn't be sold in her condition, so she was priced accordingly. They didn't think she was at a level where an aristocrat would take notice and buy her. The one who panicked was me. If I passively let him buy a slave in that terrible state, as the one who was ordered to attend to the young master, I wonder what the head of family would say.

Right on the money, when I got back, he flared up. What the heck is that inauspicious thing, throw it away! No, kill it right away! That was how it was. It was pitiful, but wasn't she a dying slave? The young 'un didn't try to cover for me and as soon as he got back, he avoided everyone. It seemed as if he would take care of her until she died when he brought her down to the basement in a rush. And then, he isolated himself with her in the basement. His Father could do nothing about it and gave up, letting him do as he pleased.

From then, about a week passed. The young master revealed his face from the basement at long last. Oh, besides that, that slave might have finally kicked the bucket, that was what I thought.

...A girl I have never seen before stood by his side. She appeared to be around six. She was fair skinned and had big eyes; certainly she would become a fine beauty when she

grows up. However, she was covered in bandages and her face was uncannily doll-like.

Yes, she must be the slave bought just the other day. That half-dead half-living slave, who still looked like she was dying, should have had a ruined face. You might not believe it, but she seemed to have been fully healed. A child, barely eight years old, accomplished it with his alchemy.

Even I had difficulties believing my own eyes. Recovery magic is, c'mon, not something **that** unexpectedly accommodating, right?

Among my acquaintances too, there was a guy who quit being a knight, with a strange twist of fate, after recovering from a bone fracture. From how I saw it, that girl's face was purposely 'shaped' that way. Nevertheless, she recovered with not a single scar or blemish. Rather than feelings of admiration, doesn't this send shivers down your spine? No matter how intelligent he was, it was something beyond the capabilities of a child. I cannot even begin to imagine something worse than that.

After that, if he had raised the girl properly, I might have seen him in a different light. He worked her considerably hard.

What's with that? It probably isn't that big of a deal if slaves were **just** treated roughly? Well, had it just been the ordinary kind, I wouldn't bat an eye but his was of a different nature. Now, now, just listen up.

First, in the morning, the maids were borrowed and under their guidance, etiquette would be driven into her head. Well, that much was understandable. From the start, she was a slave purchased in order to allow him to practice training servants. That much cannot be avoided.

However, in the afternoon — this is where I start to not comprehend. He brought her out of the mansion and to the plains in the outskirts... and there, she was made to run non-stop. A race? Nope, not that. The young master simply watched her in silence the whole time. At the start, she lasted for 30 minutes, and as she became used to it, she ran longer bit by bit until the sun set. I had no idea what was happening.

When night fell, she became a helper for his alchemy experiments. The young master was selling potions to merchants, right? That was what she was helping with. Apart from these, she was also made to do many other things.

The girl herself was very obedient. Well, I suppose she was worked as hard as those farmer brats.

And, it was when she became used to that lifestyle. This time, it was weapons training. Not the young master, but the girl. At that time, I finally understood. Making her run around those grasslands were for this purpose. That is to build her foundations. When she was purchased and brought home, she was very weak, so she had to start from physical strength. Once that was done... he made her, a girl younger than himself of all people to choose from, wield the sword. I was so shocked, I couldn't say a word.

Yes, I accepted. It was the request from the son of the head after all. I wasn't too invested in it, but the slave who begged me for guidance was frightfully serious. Once, I tried asking her. Why was she so enthusiastic about it?

And so, the girl replied flatly. It was to protect her master-sama, she said without any hesitation. No matter how much obedience magic was on her, it was still praiseworthy that he brought out her servility to this extent.

When she became reasonably good with the sword, next, it was magic. I somehow paid adventurers money to employ them as teachers. The money was from the proceeds from the sale of potions. Ultimately, the young master took an eye to her because she possessed magic. Compared to her sword training, I fully understood. But why go so far with a slave?

In the first place, if he was employing teachers, wouldn't it be better if he was the one learning magic? Rather than some mafia-like business, the job of a magician was far more prestigious. Since there were cases of court magicians gaining peerage.

And, what happened next, you ask? Well, it seemed she became good enough to be considered a decently skilled adventurer. She went out in search for stuff the young master wanted and also did other requests to make some money. It's some miserly tale isn't it? Even as a joke, the son from an Earl Family shouldn't be raising a slave for these kind of things. Instead of making a slave a trainee adventurer, couldn't he directly make a request to the adventurer's guild? In the first place, it was because doing so would be so troublesome that the guild was established. That would be mistaking the insignificant for the essential.

What? That much is no big deal? You don't particularly see a problem in his eccentric way of using slaves?

...True that. Though, this is just the tip of the iceberg. From now on, it's the real deal.

Please don't hurry me, mister. In no way is this some boastful talk. I wanted to leave this for the end as much as possible, yar.

That guy — the young master, bought another slave, not long after buying his first slave. It seemed around the time when his potions were selling well. Without the help of the family head, this time, he bought a slave with his own savings.

Nevertheless, that slave died. Even when the first one he bought, was still alive and kicking despite her initial condition. I think the slave didn't even last for half a year. Before the second slave died, he had bought his third slave. It wasn't something I paid close attention to, yeah. The fourth person was... was it the fourth? I don't really know... One day, the slave girl that was bought first, carried the corpse of a slave I have never seen before on a cart out to throw it. Other than just that girl being under that guy's — the young master's instructions to leave the mansion, there were also other unknown slaves that brought more unknown slaves' corpse out to throw.

...

Yes, that guy was killing those slaves.

Hahaha... you are making quite the mystified face huh? Mystified as to why he had no qualms about killing slaves despite not raising his hand to his retainers and maids or throwing tantrums at his family.

Oh, nope. I ain't criticising him. Certainly, I agree. That those slaves do not have citizen rights. Since they are just belongings. That's how it is written in the laws of this country too. The same goes for Sankt Gallen and Marlair. If they're just belongings, even destroying them — killing them, is not even on par with kidnapping. It's up to the owners. All depends on their moods, yeah.

My way of speaking was poor, really. Rather than killing, it was torture. Without a care for their cries or screams, he let them die in the end.

No, wrong. What you said was that he might be sadistic?

He was something different, I believe. From my long years working at that family and also from the rumours of other families, I learnt quite a bit. It wasn't just my second or third time hearing about masters from whichever family having a strange habit of

strangling women's necks when he felt like it or masters who find it pleasing to whip mistresses who come from lowly backgrounds.

Yes, yes. There are many people with peculiar pastimes in this world. Among them, there must be people who enjoy killing or enjoy necrophilia, aren't there? Wouldn't you say that it is harmless if he just stops at slaves instead of citizens with rights or, much less to say, other aristocrats?

That guy is... that monster isn't something that simple.

Calmly! He did so calmly! Regardless of whether the person was crying, screaming, groaning, dying! He doesn't cry, rage, laugh or rejoice! His frozen snake eyes follows the slaves as they writhe and die!

Ahh, no, wrong. I was wrong. Totally wrong! His reaction was that of indifference. However... right, he did say those were part of his experiments. Yes, indeed. Alchemy experiments, he said. He fed the slaves drugs, gave them injections, cut their skulls or stomachs open while they were still alive and dissected them when they died... unbelievable. Doing all that calmly, when he was just a brat!

When they grimaced in pain and died as he had planned, he would snicker! Yes, it went perfectly, he would say! The experiment was a success! When it doesn't go as expected and the slaves die, he would click his tongue! God dammit, what the heck was that guy saying!? What did he think the lives of slaves amounted to? Doing all that... it was as though he was a demon!

Yes, right. At long last, the family head couldn't take it and rushed to the church, claiming his son had been possessed by a demon.... However, the pastor diagnosed him to be clean! How can that be possible, such utter bullshit!? If that wasn't the deed of a demon, then what else could that be!?

That's right, it was all his fault that the master was at a loss. At first, he ignored it while feeling disgusted. And he was an aristocrat too. Just the slaughtering of slaves. B-but y'know!? He was doing it every single day, countless of people! How many did that guy kill in the residence!?

Dead in the night, there would be a open fire in the courtyard! I knew what it was, it was a cremation! Slaves, who were pale as sheets, were transporting dead slaves on wagons, and flinging them into the fire! While in fear of being next! Argh, damn! I remembered! The burning smell of meat mixed with medicine — till today! Even

today!

Ugh!?

Oup... ough...

Ugehhhhhhh!!

.....

Oopsies, I lost control there. Hehe, hehehe...

But y'know, I ain't spouting lies here?

Really, that monster really is abnormal.

It started when he turned eight, yeah? A normal brat would still be in his runny-nosed years, but he's still... still going against providence. I kid you not.

Yes, that is so. That was when I started to escape by indulging in liquor. He put in effort in silencing the slaves as much possible, and was afraid of public scrutiny, but I was appointed the role of patrolling the mansion as if it was karma. I saw it many times over. That hell, countless...

Mister, you don't believe me? You totally cannot believe me at all, right?

Hehehe... I forgot, this is just some nonsense from a drunkard... if that ain't it, it would just be the imaginary prattling of a crazy bastard... fufufu.

But there's nay helping it... I must have gone nuts... since I saw that...

As for him, maybe he was insane too... that's right, he must have been insane... that demon and... that girl who sticks by his side all the time...



2. At the adventurer's guild, in the capital Brosenul —Testimony of the receptionist

Welcome to the adventurer's guild! Are you looking for quests today?

Eh? No? You are here to ask questions? On behalf of the Court of Justice?

N-no, no. Over here, we're as sound as a bell, we definitely do not engage in activities that warrant extra supervision from above.

...Ahh, it's about an adventurer that registered with us? Phew, you gave me a scare.

No, it's nothing. Yes. And so, what would you like to hear about?

An employee of the Obeniel Family? A person who takes on primarily material collection quests? Huh. What has the child done?

Uh-huh. So you want to investigate on the incongruent points surrounding the succession and you wish to learn more about the people involved with the second son?

I understand. If that is the case, we will gladly cooperate. Well, I don't think we would be of much help regarding the succession issue though.

Yes, I remember clearly. Since that oddball was always standing out.

When was that though, since that happened a long time back... and what is it? With that gaze of yours.

Har, how old am I? M-my age has nothing to do with this right!? Isn't it alright to work until whatever age I want! It's my personal discretion isn't it!?

Ah.

...Ahem. I beg your pardon.

We were on the topic of that child, right? Yes, she was indeed a child that leaves a deep impression. Everything about her from top to bottom was strange.

From the time she registered with the guild, she towered above the rest. It was weird. Anyhow, she was such a small child.

That is so. We are not even sure if she **is** ten years old. Moreover, she was a girl.

I was quite shocked... when I noticed a carriage bearing a snake insignia had stopped in front of the guild, a noble child and his attendant maid got off. I initially guessed that he was the client for a quest. It was rare for a child to be the client, but obviously, he was an aristocrat so that was possible. Perhaps he succeeded the family at a young age and maybe had one or two important errands that he wanted the guild to put requests for. However, I was mistaken.

That child came to register as an adventurer, you see. Yes, that young master, the second son of the Obeniel Family said so himself.

I was taken aback. What are you saying, child? Are you sane? If he asked to register himself, I would be able to understand, just barely. It was common to see boys yearning to be adventurers, and there were cases of aristocrats becoming adventurers when they weren't inheriting the family. That being said, the person he wanted to register was his attendant maid. I asked him to repeat a few times, but he would reply that it was **this** child each time.

So, I took a good look, and the thing was, the tiny-looking maid-san wore a collar. A silver crude-looking collar. Yes, it was a slave collar.

Well, registering slaves as adventurers was, umm, not totally unheard of. There were parties that had slaves to carry their luggage or to act as meatshields when the time calls for it. Or on the extreme, a rich person might form an all-slave party and use them fully until they were wiped out, that kind of stuff.

Still... a girl? Furthermore, she was a cute doll-like and slim girl with a fair complexion. No matter how you think of it, rather than give her the job of an adventurer, I think she should have remained as a maid.

Not only would that not pose a problem to the system, it would also be totally up to the owner to use his slave too. And yet, wasn't what he was doing throwing aside all face and rational thinking?

And that's why, just to make sure, I asked. Do you really want to become an adventurer? I said to the slave child. It is written officially in the regulations that, "A requirement to be an adventurer is that the person intends to go adventuring". With this, if the child was unwilling, I would have called it off.

Well, had the obedience magic been used beforehand and she was instructed to say "Yes" when being asked like that, then it couldn't be helped. Nevertheless, the person who brought her was a child too. I was sure that he would be caught in this trick of mine.

And next? Somehow the child agreed readily without stumbling. She was willing from her heart.

How did I know? Though there might be obedience magic, it is still unable to change one's intentions. With resistance from slaves themselves, orders that bend one's will would make slaves behave slowly and hesitantly. Still, that child showed none of that. It really was her own desire.

I accepted the registration since there was nothing more I could do. I am a receptionist, after all.

It may sound harsh, but in this field, the fundamental principles are freedom and self-responsibility. Freedom is to allow one to become an adventurer even if it is illogical. Freedom is to allow one to take on requests that are beyond their abilities. Freedom is to allow one to die for the aforementioned reason. I cannot hinder a person who wanted to be an adventurer from doing so. Naturally, as befitting of my position, I would earnestly recommend that they take quests which are aligned with their abilities whenever possible. Since this concerns the trust between us and the requesting client too.

Ahh, my apologies. I veered off topic.

That child's name was... her name was Yuni. She did not have a surname. She registered at the age of ten. Her registered class — a name that reflects one's signature moves and job scope — was Spellsword.

Isn't this amazing? A Spellsword is, among the adventurers, a start amongst the stars. Wielding both magic and the sword, a Spellsword can easily deal with any situation. Saying it from the mouth is easy, but it isn't just about innate talent, it has to be complemented with a correspondingly high level of training to be fit for this class. Bluntly speaking, it isn't something a slave can become, much less a ten year old girl.

Oh, yes. From what I overheard, there was a puzzling request from the Obeniel Family many years ago. Anyways, it was something about requesting for adventurers to teach skills to a slave. The request was handled by a senior of mine, and when I heard about it, I thought to myself that there really existed weird aristocrats, but now, on hindsight, it was in order to train her, I suppose.

Obviously, she became famous in a blink of an eye. She was a slave, a girl, a Spellsword and a maid to boot. A clump of controversies.

Had she anything to do with maids, you ask? Of course, she had. That child, for some reason, was wearing a maid uniform. Even when she came to take requests, or to receive rewards or when shopping in town — always. Most likely, she dons that outfit when she goes adventuring too. That's what the rumours, originating from the town's gatekeepers, say about her. They said they let a collared maid with a sword through. Weird, right?

It wasn't just one or two occasions when other parties caught wind of the rumours and asked the owner to sell her to them. As you know, she is a slave and if the owner was agreeable, her status was such that her very self was a tradable product. It is human nature for a buyer to want to get their hands on an excellent rookie. And to top it off, since she had a beautiful appearance, don't you think she has the makings of an extraordinary meal, if you get what I mean? Well, the young master did not part with her in the end.

You ask how she fared as an adventurer? Undisputedly stellar. Because she did not form parties and went solo — what you may term as a lone wolf — she did not go for large-scale quests which required the strength of numbers. However, her request completion rate exceeded 90 per cent. Most of her failed quests were due to other adventurers who booked it and established a lead. For a solo who does mainly exploration and item finding quests, she probably surpasses the skill level of a ranger.

She stopped at rank C, but if she took on most quests like how other normal parties do, I believe she would be A class by now. Originally, the right to give yourself a nickname is reserved for rank Bs and above, but for her, we made an exception and allowed her to do so at rank C. Currently, she is known as "Yuni the Silver Wolf" and her name has spread so wide that if you are an adventurer in these parts, but didn't know her name, chances are you are an illegal adventurer.

Huh, you cannot grasp the extent of her abilities? A rank A adventurer might be tasked to subjugate dragons. Does that make it easier to understand? An incident that requires the mobilisation of an army of significant size can be dealt with the capabilities of a few rank As — or possibly just one alone... Right, she has no impressive achievements that can be examined for reference, but from my standpoint, she is doubtlessly a rank A.

Just that, well... she is a troublemaker. She was a docile girl and was not the type to start a tussle. After all, she stands out doesn't she? Adventurers are a capricious lot who live acting fancifully and showing off. Among these brutes, as long as you are too

outstanding, you'll be embroiled in conflicts in no time.

For example, let me see...

It happened when she was still a beginner, I guess? There was a group of three people coming from some other place to the capital. And so, like her who came to take on a request, they came to book a request they wanted to do. And the case was that the other side was senior , larger in numbers and what's more, male. They took a high-handed position and recommended that she hand over the request. However, she didn't back down. That child became an adventurer in order to secure funds and desired materials used for research for her master-sama. Basically, she wanted to have the request in order to gain permission to enter the hunting ground which is normally restricted for entry.

Thus, one of the members of the party exploded in anger. Since she was wearing a collar, they could tell she was a slave with a glance. If they let this slave make light of them, wouldn't their future progression be doomed? As I mentioned earlier, it was common sense that slaves were sacrificial pawns made to carry luggage. Hence, they thought all they had to was to show her some pain and she would back down quietly. Using just their hands, they tried to smash her and send her flying.

Right, emphasis on "tried". That child nimbly dodged and dealt with the ones who made a move on her by tripping them, making them fall in an unsightly manner. That made me chuckle. No, looking back on the incident, I didn't think it was something funny though.

By now you should be able to guess what happened later, yes? In front of crowd and a very busy one at that, they became notorious for getting lightly dealt with by a tiny girl. A great disgrace. Under these circumstances, whatever they do would just be piling shame upon shame, yeah, since it got so out of hand. Like this, they seethed with murderous intent. You're just a slave, what are you trying to pull!

And so was Yuni resentful of them, you ask? She wasn't an ordinary person though. No matter how much she was denounced as a slave, she kept a clear and composed look. What is a slave anyway?

That was the feel of it. She must be loyal to her master-sama from the bottom of heart huh, I thought at that moment. Still, that kind of attitude of hers just added more fuel to the fire. Even though it would have been all good if the chap who attacked her first and the others gave up then, they said it. Insults to her master-sama, that is.

...Please don't ask me for the details? By any chance, if word gets to that child, my life would be in danger.

And, by the time I realised what happened, the area became a bloodbath. She really did it, that child. A quick job that even my eyes couldn't keep up with. I remember that scene where the breeze blew with a *whoosh*. Despite being indoors. She must have used some gale-type magic. She drew a one handed sword, connected it with a swing and brought down one person. She used magic to deal with the remaining two with her other free hand, one by one. That was what happened, I think... since I couldn't catch sight of it, it's just conjecture. Can you believe it? A ten year old girl, freely slaying three men who were greater in age, body and probably experience in adventuring? Had I not known how that girl operates, I would most likely be having nightmares.

She was blameless. The loss of a battle between fellow adventurers was decided by death. They are a lot who spend their years battling monsters, and consequently, many of them were quick to pick a fight. Furthermore, most of them have fighting ability appropriate to their way of life, therefore, mediating would be a pain. That's why, well, dying in that kind of situation meant that the dying person was in the wrong. A person worthy of the name "adventurer" adventures day in, day out, and it is the maxim that they protect themselves in these adventures. Of course, if someone murdered ordinary townsfolk, they would be excommunicated from the guild and be made a subjugation target, though.

Leaving that aside, the real scary part starts from here. It being a one-sided slaughter rather than them killing one another, made it all the more scarier.

She was shaking. She was an expressionless girl who was always quiet, smileless and did not even sulk. That was the first time I've seen her emotions thrown off balance. Large tears welled up in her eyes and she bawled her eyes red. At first, I got the wrong idea. That, ah, Yuni was indeed a girl. That crying in regret after murder was something likely for a girl.

However. She might have been a newbie, but she was still an adventurer. Someday, when she gets used to her requests, she will find bandit subjugation requests among them. If I'm not mistaken, that young master did show interest in a portion of the stolen goods and negotiated directly with the requester to obtain them in exchange for the reward money.... She had already killed people. I remember her plopping down a leather bag containing a freshly severed head as proof of completing that request. It

totally killed the mood.

In that case, I considered if she would be arrested and punished but that won't happen. Since she knew how to read and was a serious person by nature, she should have remembered the rules of the guild. I did pass her the rules of the guild when she was registered. She should at least know that there would not be any punishments regarding her case.

And so, I asked her even though it would have been great if I'd just kept quiet. Yuni-chan, what's the matter? Wasn't that question out-of-place? I'd likely lost it after witnessing the blood sprays and smelling the intense reek of blood. I usually won't be near such scenes. Saying such a thing to a child who had killed just a moment ago. Despite knowing that a calm human would consider this being a child killing an outlaw.

She replied. Saying that she went against the instructions of her master-sama. That she did that despite being told not to start disputes.

...I could hear my own blood changing colour. I felt cold sweat flowing profusely. That there were monsters that bore such resemblance to humans. A monster that I could never hope to understand by way of thinking or behaviour. In fact, it felt like it had suddenly appeared in the middle of town. I mean, is this the first thought of a person who just killed someone? Before feeling guilt or fear from punishment, her first concern was her master, you know?

I cannot comprehend her reasoning. I had believed that she was **that** afraid of being punished but it appears that I was wrong. From what she said, her master-sama was benevolent. That he would smile and forgive her for any small mistakes. And yet, she went ahead and disobeyed his instructions because she was pampered so. She said she was afraid that she turned out to be such a bad slave.

She must have been flustered too. That scenario of her describing clearly her true feelings, was the first and the last. Though that is as far as I have heard. She was baring out such a unique and crazy way of thinking after all. My brain couldn't keep up. I felt a terrible nausea, but it wasn't just because of the disastrous scene.... I was afraid. In front of me, was a ten year old child crying uncontrollably. The reason for her crying was still ambiguous.

And what next, you ask? There was nothing I could do so I called for her master-sama.

That child cried for as long as she stood, so I wanted him to come and take her back. I wanted the shepherd who could precisely control that unfathomable living thing, to help bring her back home quickly. I mean, isn't that the case? Not only does she kill others without hesitation, I do not know what goes through in her head at all. That being is constantly in a state that goes beyond the boundaries of reason. That is enough to be considered terrifying.

That young master, the distinguished son of the Obeniel Family, made a "can't be helped" expression before accompanying me. With really quick steps. Because it took great pains to explain the situation to the residence's doorkeepers. He was a friendly person to an extent where you wouldn't think he was an aristocrat. Oh, uh, sorry. You were from the High Court of Justice and are an aristocrat too. That was a slip of the tongue.

And so, the young master brought that child back and the day ended. She was amazing, you know. As soon as the young master arrived, she got onto her knees. There was a puddle of dried blood on the floor but she didn't seem to notice at all. Her beautiful appearance unshowered by a single spurt of blood was stained red in the time it takes to say "ah". It was unforgettable. While going down on her hands and knees, she apologised many times over by saying, "I am sorry, I am sorry". The young master's reaction?... He smiled and forgave her. Yes, he was a really valiant and broad-minded person. In addition, he possessed wisdom. After hearing what happened, he quickly guessed that the party she fought with were wanderers not from these parts. He consoled her by telling her that it didn't seem like they would have backers in this area, so it wasn't that serious of a fight. Wasn't he a kind master? The bad impression that I had when he first brought her here was instantly blown away.

...What is it? I am making a weird expression?

Eh? You ask if I didn't feel anything scary or weird from her master?

Ahaha, please stop. I have no reason to think like that of her master, right? I mean, c'mon, right? Judging based on our conversation here, right?

Please guess my answer. Really. I beseech of you.

Well, these kinds of things happen. From then on, whenever the adventurers in these parts spot a maid, they would pay attention as to whether that maid had a collar on her. Sometimes, there would be freshies who are unaware of that and upon incurring her wrath, they would disappear into an unknown darkness or something like that.

Such a ghost story is also prevalent here. Ahahaha.

There seems to be several similar cases like that, but the one that leaves the biggest impression on me was this incident. After all, it happened before my very eyes. My liver went cold—, honestly.

Ahh, besides that.

Please do not get me wrong here? I've said quite a fair bit but I do not really dislike her. I see her often on a normal basis, she always behaves seriously, and above all, she was talented. Though, she is a little hard to understand, gives full priority to her master's affairs and thinks very little of killing others. I can say this because I have been in this industry for a long time. I have grown used to seeing people who are different from others or people who are broken somewhere. There's a fairly large proportion of these kind of people, yeah? Of course, her level of anomaly was rare though.

But, just but. For an adventurer, some level of madness would make it a right fit for the job.

For a first-rate adventurer, if they accomplish one big job, they can profit enough to live enjoyably for awhile. It was an amount that a commoner would never be able to make in his whole life. Nevertheless, there exist a whole lot of them who are never satisfied and would continue braving the risk. Despite there being the danger of forfeiting one's life with a single blunder, no matter what kind of job it is. They would gleefully poke their heads into quarrels and continue stepping into labyrinths. Don't you find that weird? Every last one of them wore down their minds by continuously putting lives on the edge. Surely, they have a loose screw somewhere. And so, for these people, when they become absurdly skillful, they get out of hand.

That's why I have a hypothesis. A person being mad somewhere is, in some way, a requirement to be a top-notch adventurer. Humans who stand in places where ordinary people wouldn't, would naturally possess something different in their hearts. In that case, she is unmistakably top-notch, I guess. In fact, the job is perfect for her. If the master doesn't want to let her thread on a tiger's tail, we would not have any qualms on our part. Adventurer is the perfect calling for her. Though her real job is a slave maid.

Can I say whether she is here?

Unfortunately, we had to relinquish our valuable talent.

Yes, regarding the master studying abroad, I heard he was at Sankt Gallen. Truly wasted. Though, I hear he has returned as of recent. Still, I haven't seen him at all. Maybe he is busy with work at his residence? Well, there is no doubt she is with her master.

If you do meet with that child, please send my regards. Also tell her, please do consider doing some quests at our guild when she's free. I am still somewhat apprehensive about her, but as long as I do not meddle unnecessarily, she would be a reliable person.

To her master... please tell him to hold onto her reins tightly. Yes, that's all I can think of to say to him.

Still, about this conversation, is it really related to the succession matter?

Chapter 4

Adventures of the Snake <Overseas Arc>

3. At Sankt Gallen Federation: Galerin Magic Academy — Testimony of Professor Pow Egbel von Glauman.

Welcome to this, far, faraway land. I can't offer much hospitality, but you may make yourself at home.

Anyways, this is really... wow. The Alcael Kingdom's High Court of Justice is surprisingly blessed with human resources. Although it's just for an investigation of an Earl Family's succession, you guys actually sent people to other countries.

What? You came here to investigate things you wanted to know? It's not an official dispatch but by your own leave? That you came here out of pocket and not with taxpayer money?

Hahahahaa! Wow, wow, I'm impressed! Your hunger for knowledge , your aspiring passion and your curiosity! Absolutely wonderful! To us alchemists, this quality is the most necessary! More so than magic to shake the Heavens and the Earth or the intellect which see through all nature!

How about it, dear guest? Wanna join me as my disciple? You are still young aren't you? Starting out this path now isn't late at all, yeah?

...Not interested? I see, it's a pity.

Well, alright. Let's get to the main point.

So it's about that Oubeniel? That guy was truly an excellent student. He was enrolled for merely 1 year, 1 month and 23 days, but in that timespan, he left behind contributions which cannot be counted with all my fingers and toes. That level of talent was in the history of our alchemist course... no, rather, even if you unravelled the entire school's history, there'll be nobody as talented as him. It's most disappointing. If he didn't drop out of school midway, he might be using his smarts as my right hand right now, or perhaps, he might be sitting in my position.

Oh? Isn't that an exceedingly surprised expression you are making. You find it unbelievable that I am lavishing praise on him?

It seems that you must have heard quite some negative rumours about him before coming here.

That is unavoidable. The history of alchemy is the history of battling prejudice and misunderstanding. Just by hearing the name itself, people would be filled with misconceptions and misunderstandings. Alchemy — the act of converting iron or lead into gold, among the numerous people who tried it, only one succeeded. The metamorphosis of the material and evolution of the soul to a higher-order spirit... that was the original aim of alchemy. There are imposters who heard about alchemy and would do some monkey imitation of it randomly, by dyeing iron the colour yellow just for appearances. And yet, the fools of the world spread what they have seen, as though that was the true nature of alchemy — as if alchemy is just another thing that fraudsters do. This happened more than 400 years ago. The people of the world are still dancing to such rotten rumours.

Hrm. Looks like I caught your attention. How 'bout it, guest? I would like to hear one or two anecdotes about the him you know and your impression of him. It should be interesting to judge how your country perceive alchemy through your evaluation of him. Anyways, just listening to me talking alone would make this somewhat dry. A souvenir in the form of a tale wouldn't be bad.

.....

.....

.....Deplorable.

As expecting, gaining acceptance from the world is surprisingly difficult.

...mm? What?

Aren't I angry, you ask? Whether I am bothered by his way of trampling on a skill which I put in so much effort to learn?

For the present, I don't really think much of it.

Human experimentation? The use of slaves? Nobles are blue-blooded beings, doesn't it not matter how much dirty blood they shed? What kind of crime can that be

classified anyways? The laws of your country are shadowy, but I do remember that the laws for treatment of slaves is roughly the same as other countries. Hm, so there really is no difference. Then there shouldn't be a problem.

What? His acts were twisted? Certainly it wasn't something fanciful to see. But, what of it?

In the first place, alchemy is something that resides with the truth of the world and the secrets of life. And, the truth is more often than not, cruel, and most likely, life itself is something that possesses many dirty facets. Think about it, you must have held a woman before.... What are you blushing for? This isn't something to be embarrassed about. Isn't the interaction between males and females a ritual with a lofty vision to bring about the next generation of life? Hn?

I am going off topic? Hahahahah, what are you saying. I am just using an analogy to make this easier for you to understand.

You think this discussion of holding woman is some vulgar commoner gossip don't you? The natural act of intercourse to make children shouldn't be spoken of overtly huh? This and that Oubeniel dude's experiments are on the same axle. For all living things, by searching every nook and cranny, we would discover their vulgar, ugly and disgusting aspects. Take our meals for example. For humans, if we don't eat, we'll starve to death won't we? That's why we eat our meals. We eat to fill our bellies, to regain our energy, so that we may live to tomorrow. Now then, what happens to the food we ate? No matter how appetising the food was, as long as it enters the mouth, it is diced by teeth, run through by the tongue and smeared by saliva... it becomes a miserable sight. Later it enters the gullet, falls into the stomach and is digested until not a single trace of it remains. That means, no matter how effort the chef puts into decorating the food, it is as good as an ugly slime. What's more, it enters the intestines, have its nutrition and moisture absorbed into the body... finally, it is expelled from the buttocks as excretion. Yes, shit. Gourmet food eaten by royalty or wheat porridge eaten by lowly commoners, as long as they are eaten, they end up as shit or puke.

The same goes for research. Whether you like it or not, without facing that kind of ugliness, one would be unable to progress.

Let's assume that a diarrhoeal disease is endemic in this country. If the outbreak is to be suppressed, the patient's stinky and dirty excretion, which can be as formless as drool, has to be examined in detail. How did it become like that? What has to be done

to bring the patient's body back to a state when they excrete normal shit with normal frequency? Without putting in serious thought, it won't work out. His experiments do exist for a prolonged period too. To the untrained, it must appear creepy and cold-blooded.

What was the objective of Oubeniel's research? Hmm, he was an all-rounded individual after all. As long as it drew his interest, he would expend whatever he can on it. From improving experimental tools from a mechanical perspective, to the compilation of research history. Mixing of miracle medicines, manufacturing homunculus, creating chimeras, casting of equipment. He does anything. However, all these are just footholds for him to strike at his main research.

The field that he wrestled with, with the most enthusiasm was biology. That is also a domain that has to do with the root of life. Why are humans, humans? Why do we think? Why are we born? Why do we die? Why are we, why are we, why are we... The answers to this bottomless question is not something that can be concluded after many days of thinking.

He left such a thesis. *The correlation between a living being's brain function and the soul*. This is probably some grand compilation of the things you have heard he has done, particularly the ones you feel are disgusting.

First, slaves were prepared as experimental subjects.... With regards to this and that, he wasn't that indecisive. At worst, he might be a topic for the gossips.

And so, he cut open the heads of the test subjects and anesthetized a portion of their brains which correspond to a particular human function. Do you understand the functions of the brain?... Don't know? You don't know? Whoa! What in the world! To think the world is still this ignorant of the structure of life!!

...Sorry, lost my composure there.

Well, to put it simply, the brain is what governs the mind and body of living things. So if the brain of a person is destroyed, he cannot live? Of course. Just like how a country is fragmented when they lose their king, a human's body stops altogether when the control tower — the brain, is lost. The heart stops too. Death. That is where one would end up when the brain, the controller of the body is gone. Do you understand this now? Know it now? Okay, good.

Next is the role of the heart. The functions related to the heart, like thinking and feeling of emotions are also under the jurisdiction of the brain. If you cannot understand it, surely you can feel it on your skin. This is what most people will say when they meet a lunatic. Crazy in the head! They'd say.

That is what that damned Oubeniel is attempting to do. Crazy in the head, madman. What becomes of the hearts and the souls of such people?

To find out about that, he first obtained some healthy subjects. Next, he sliced their heads open and destroyed the part in the brain that controls the heart. Another person had the portion which govern emotions destroyed. Another, had the part retaining memories destroyed. Etcetera. Naturally, the subjects became insane.

And, he euthanised them.

...Ahh, stay with me to the end. He wasn't particularly glad when he had to kill people after they lost their sanity. It was necessary for his research. Soothe your soul and listen calmly. If anything, do you need some painkillers? You'll calm down immediately, y' know? What, don't need them? Then, you can calm your spirit through your own will.

Here's where the meaty part is. In this Magic Academy, there are teachers specialised in various spheres, teaching each and every subject out there. Nevertheless, the multi-talented Oubeniel had a different specialisation from them. Isn't it normal for mages? Particularly for this research, whenever there is a technique relevant to it, he would definitely learn it. And, in exchange for some help in other study subjects, a certain mage participated in his research.

A necromancer.... You're pale again, are you alright? Shall I continue?

Apart from anesthetizing a part of their brains, he called upon the souls of dead test subjects with necromancy. From conversing with spirits and assessing their mental state, he observed the effects on their soul the damage on the brains of their bodies had done.

And you know what! He discovered something shocking!

The madness of most of the souls of the test subjects were proportional to the time after the operation! For example, amnesia! A person who died quickly after the

operation would be able to recall memories of his life even if he had forgotten who he was before dying. However, for those who were alive for longer, they won't even be able to decipher language!

Do you know what this means? His experiments demonstrated that the brain has the role of processing information from ears and eyes and sending them to the soul! Insanity is a phenomenon that occurs when the soul receives disorderly information from the brain! Furthermore! The soul, memories and consciousness closely influence one another but they are all different things! That boy managed to pull off the excellent job of establishing that kind of proof!

This is likely considered a great finding! You should have heard of these fairy-tales when you were young. The reincarnation of a great hero and an evil sorcerer who replaces his aging flesh using black magic... this is no hallucination! It is very possible! It is possible to move a soul from one body to another!

Trials to reproduce the results have so far ended in failure. That is to be expected. Whenever those necromancers are involved, even bringing out the souls of the dead and talking with them has yet to be established to date! They haven't even come close to it! But, from now on, it'll be different!? The soul and memory! Firmly maintain these two and transplant them into a body with a healthy consciousness! By doing so, a person can preserve his existence in the present world eternally!

Of course, that is not possible now. The theory is there but we don't know how to put it into practice. However, this marks the baby steps for the cause. Pseudo-immortality. That boy has splendidly taken the first step to get closer to answering the biggest problems of alchemy!

...

Whoops, I lost my cool again. I unintentionally remembered my euphoria back then. These old bones were overwhelmed by his deed.

It seems that this Oubeniel dude must have at a considerably earlier stage — likely before enrolling into the academy — formulated this hypothesis. After all, he was familiar with tampering with human brains. He must have not announced it earlier because he did not have the right person to demonstrate it to. Truly wonderful. Establishing such an advanced theory in his teens, as well as being conscientious towards studies related to demonstrating his theory. A model for alchemists.

Despite this, that damn board of directors. Finding fault with something lame and expelling him. This is something that would make, if I may exaggerate, a “wiseman meeting” weep. Ahhh, what a waste!

The reason for his expulsion? I do not know the details. The duties of an academy lecturer are to do research and conduct lectures. Consequently, I hardly pry into the private lives of my students. Speaking of which, I should have grasped some aspects of his personality by now. If I had guessed his circumstances, I might have been able to protect him... Arghh, is this what they call, letting a big fish escape!?

Yes, right. He from start to end, spoke about research and nothing else. He actively participated in debates, yeah?

He didn't dine in the mess hall? As I have stated just awhile ago, no matter what the food is, in the end, it will end as shit from the ass. It is best to quickly gain nutrition. I doubt he had spare time for eating in a mess and socialising. Moreover, doing that while chatting with others is the height of inefficiency. Eating and socialising, what meaning can there be to do these two contradictory actions in parallel? Separate whatever you can separate, this way it is faster to finish all of them. Isn't that the wisdom of humans?

Well, I will tell you the gist of it. A fight occurred between him and a certain student. I also heard that it was about an illicit love affair. Of course, it was that student who started being violent first. That Oubeniel shouldn't be too fond of pointless fighting. The conclusion of the fight was that the student had the tables turned on him, suffering major injuries and was left in a half-dead state. To top things off, his disgrace was in full view of the public. In bitterness, he must have gotten him expelled from school, I believe. That student was this country's... how should I put it... in any case, a blood relation of a high ranking aristocrat.

Slave maid? Oh, that huh! That is also some good stuff! One of Oubeniel's masterpieces! Combining both form and function, that golden ratio is the work of god!

Speaking of which, I have a feeling that the person in question who was the target of that illicit love was her. A nonsensical attempt. He wouldn't even let **me** meddle with her. I really wanted to try to dissect her but unfortunately, I couldn't. Not to mention the trivial and blasphemous lust I felt towards her.

What was she, you ask? Just an ordinary human. However, she was frighteningly

capable. Even I mistook her for a homunculus initially. It appears that it was the result of continuous prescription of strength-boosting medicines and the conducting of elaborate high level training.

Monster? Wrong, she was a monster-ish human. Just like how a chimera isn't a homunculus. She was genuinely a human. Though she was the product of top-class alchemy. She did not purely display skills that are visible, and instead, improved her abilities steadily and diligently. Certainly it is true that transplanting other living being's genes, like a chimera, would make it stronger. Still, there is always the risk of rejection and there are negative effects on future potential. He must have disliked that. Progressively prescribing medicine with few side effects and piling up effective training on her, that maid became a human that overcame the limits of a human.

If I may say so myself, it's an artificial hero. We hear it in abundance in legends don't we? Stories of a sage who had to study hard and a hero who had an unusual power. This time, it's the alchemist as the medium instead... thinking about it, what's frightening is the beginning phase. Other than just needing to expend a startling amount of time, this method gives no leeway for second chances. Probably, him and her started the "process" when their ages were in the single digits. That's how she became so perfect. That damn Oubeniel, humbly claimed that it was only because she was an excellent material. Isn't that laughable? How is that only because of that if he had studied on his own when he was a child and managed to produce such a wonderful work as an alchemist?

What? Wouldn't this be considered illegal? What are you saying. Prescribing the appropriate medicine, taking care of her whether it's rainy or stormy, all he did was raise her carefully. All he did was that. Is that an illegal act in your country? Surely not, I presume. In fact, he has gone out of his way to do a good favour, hasn't he?

Oh? You are going pale again. Are you chronically sick? Though I might be able to understand if your cheeks reddened from being touched by his actions...

Can you keep up with what I'm saying? Are you satisfied with hearing about his achievements as an alchemist?

But I still have much more to say about him though... it cannot be helped if you are feeling unwell. A poor body constitution worsens the blood flow in the brains. In that kind of state, work performance declines. Please take care of yourself.

Ahh, if you'd like to know about his behaviour as a student, I know where to find you a former classmate. Let me write an introduction letter for you now. You are in luck. Since I hardly have any contacts with the students.

By the way, do you really not aspire to do alchemy?

...I see, that is unfortunate. I don't have much hope that you'll be as skillful as Oubeniel but I still lack talent under my wing. My remaining years are short after all. Where is that person who would complete the immortality research before I pass on...



4. At Sankt Gallen Federation: Galerin Magic Academy — Testimony of Student, Fredrica Yulian von Castelberon.

A referral from Professor Glauman? How rare of him. To think he would actually bother with something else other than research. Was he in an extremely good mood?

So then, what business did you come here with?

Huh, an investigation centred around a particular family succession.

...Oubeniel? Could it be Talese Shernan Oubeniel?

Ahhh, how can this be!? When I had finally forgotten about him, I hear that guy's name again!

Yes, right. Personally, I feel nothing like coziness and friendliness with him. That guy goes around creating trouble and every time, he would one-sidedly push the cleaning up to me. It believe it is because the professor likes to regularly meet with his favourite students that he actually remembers me. If that wasn't the case, there is no way he can recall both a person's face and name correctly! God dammit, we're all studying in the same course but why am I the one drawing the short end of the stick all the time?

Huh? Am I well acquainted with him? Is that a first rate joke from your country? Didn't I mention it earlier? There is nothing like that between him and me. In the first place, I don't think that guy is capable of something that refined, much less him being popular with the girls. Having a friendship with him is only possible if you become his sacrificial lamb and let him tamper with your brain.

Are you clear now? Well then, I'd like you to retract your previous statement please. Since you come from the High Court, surely you are fully aware of what defamation means, yes?

...Good.

Now then, let's make this brief. This conversation would just be a pain for both of us. Yes, a person who finds the affairs of that guy interesting is probably a fella who enjoys a third rate comedy.

It was the spring of three years ago when I first met him. I said this earlier but, we were in the same course. Before the lecture began, he was the subject of rumours among the students. Even though alchemy is considered to be under the field of magic, it was an insular practice and is easily subject to misunderstanding. What an oddball he must be, to venture overseas to study alchemy.

Ahh, please do not misread me. I am not like that repugnant maverick nor that eccentric Professor Glauman. I am not so devoted to alchemy that I would abandon my humanity. My goal was to learn some practical skills that can be applied to medical science. During epidemics, there will be people who fail to get treated with recover magic, not to mention that mages are scarce, aren't they? For that matter, people with weak magic can create medicine if they have the raw ingredients and can produce a significant portion in one go.

Back on topic. About Oubeniel studying abroad, it seems that it was a recommendation from his family. I do not know of the details, but I heard word that it was either an instigation from his brother, in which he was falling behind in the inheritance dispute since he was dedicated to alchemy, or his father who gave up on him and chased him, the nuisance who had been conducting overly immoral experiments, out of the family. From my perspective, both are equally plausible. With his passion for alchemy, he would not be cut out for the responsibilities as the head of an Earl family and also, with him doing those kind of experiments at home day in day out, it must have caused his parents to go crazy.

My first impression of him? I guessed he was a docile and harmless person. From the rumours, I heard that he was a match for Professor Glauman and imagined him to be a person who pays no heed to anything other than research, so anything different about him would surprise me instead. His getup was orderly, conventional and clean.

Not a loquacious guy, but when hit up with a conversation, he would reply clearly. As long as it was normal situation, as the descendent of an Earl Family, his conduct cannot be considered passable nor is it failable.

However, Yuni-san — a maid who wore the symbol of a slave, the collar, and accompanied him from his house — was somewhat unacceptable.

Still, that was just for appearances. Doesn't the same goes for you? The face you make when encouraging your colleagues at work. The relaxed face you make towards your family. The face you make when you are alone and not particularly facing anyone. Everyone carries along with themselves many different faces but, in his case, the difference was like night and day.

I noticed it when we were doing a practical on dissection.... ,Please don't make that expression. It's not like I was in a merry mood while chopping up the corpse. It was purely because it was a required lecture. I don't have a hobby of cutting up bodies to the extent of "manufacturing" corpses like Oubeniel.

So anyways, it was at that time; it was also my first time unearthing a body like that. Though it wasn't my first time being in proximity with human death. I have seen refugees dying by the roadside, slaves at my family being granted death after earning displeasure, or relatives passing away. Nevertheless, despite what I just said, putting the scalpel on a corpse was a completely different sensation. Actually, the lecturer was the person performing the operation. However, as I was looking at the body that was being cut opened, or staring long and hard at the hollow face repeatedly, or looking at the grotesque inner entrails, or smelling the mixed smell of rot and medicine, I felt... nauseated. My body clattered and a hard lump of nausea forced its way up my stomach. I wanted to flee right away from the practical and hide under the covers of my bed in the dormitory.

Somehow, I remember feeling how pathetic I was then. I aspired to save the suffering of people who were ill, so I pushed through the opposition from my parents and enrolled into the Academy. And yet, the first step... the practical of learning the construct of a human body. Being fed up with myself, I thought of myself as an awful disgrace. However, I was also reluctant to escape from the lecture. I averted my gaze from the specimen. At that time, I tried to observe the faces of my classmates around me. Those that were making the same expression as I did were still enduring it. This detestable and repugnant feeling and the urge to hide was the same for everyone. Thinking that everyone was going through the same thing, I could hold my

ground. Perhaps, it was just a matter of me being not looking at an opened corpse, but still, thinking about it today, I still believe that was how I felt then.

The other students attending the lecture had pale expressions. It must have been their first time bearing witness to a dissection too. Ahh, so I wasn't the only one that was in dread, I thought and heaved a sigh of relief that was kinda out-of-place. They also noticed what I felt and naturally, felt less tense.

Nevertheless, while the majority felt the same way as I did during the dissection and endured through it, there were people who were exceptions to this response.

First, people who displayed a greater rejection towards the dissection. I guess they weren't doing so well. At the start of the dissection, there was a person who covered his mouth and ran out to the hallway and another two people followed him out thereafter. They didn't excuse themselves and yet, the lecturer didn't seem to pay any heed to it. It must be a yearly thing, that there are people who cannot take it and run away. I can understand how these people feel. I too felt queasy and even if I got used to it, I won't be able to do it in a good mood.

The next group of people are the ones who have experienced dissection before entering school. There are people who voluntarily entered school to do alchemy, well, the enthusiastic people, who would go out of their way to do some research before learning at school. Naturally, this 'research' includes dissection. These people who have done it before, cracked jokes together with the others who were the same as them, and immersed themselves in their superiority as they look down with derision on people like me who shudder at their first experience. Furthermore, they were completely cool about it. If I may say so honestly, I don't think it was that good of a hobby.

The last group of people... yes, it's Oubeniel. Without a single change in complexion, he quietly observed the progression of the practical. At the start, I thought that he might have dissected humans before. No, he definitely has experience in it. However... compared to the other experienced people, he had a different atmosphere. I had, involuntarily, mulled over it since I wouldn't regain my senses until my attention was diverted. Anyways, I was distracted by something else later. And so, I nonchalantly studied the difference between him and the other experienced people.

I understood the distinction immediately. Indeed, he had an unusual appearance compared to others who have done dissection before. Rather than being fidgety, he

was more mesmerised, though the bottomline is that he wore a different expression from the rest. Isn't it true? No matter how well-accustomed you are, you are still coming into contact with the death of a person. It is difficult to maintain the same everyday emotion in that kind of scenario. In some sense, they were all greenhorns. Becoming so used to the dissection that he was able to keep his nervousness in check and switch into his normal mood. Cutting the dead body by himself, observing the insides without any deep thoughts and keeping his hands and eyes sharp. Having a loose tongue and looking down on others, those "experienced people" were just airheads. They were just comforting themselves that they have experience and were only pretending to be fine with it. It occurred to me that he must have done it countless of times.

Oubeniel was poles apart. The lecturer or the me who had done hands-on several times, we were still a far cry from him. He gave off the impression that it would be weird if it didn't feel normal. He didn't turn blue and run away, neither did he put on a exhilarated front to deceive others, nor did he psyched himself up to appear normal. His eyes were the same as when he was joking with friends, drinking soup at the cafeteria or reading books at the library. He was so adapted to it that he didn't even change his expression.

A cold shiver ran down my spine. He was the same whether it was related to the life of a human, or its death. What was his frame of mind such that he could have eyes of unchanging colour? In the moment this question arose in my mind, I felt more ill than ever before — I dashed out of the practical room too.

Strange huh? Certainly that is it. In other words, with just one look into his eyes. If that alone was enough to judge a person, there shouldn't be anyone having difficulties in making a living in the world. Initially, I believed it was because I felt unwell, it was merely a delusion. However, I had a vague uneasiness, or a kind of foreboding, something of that kind you know? Surely you've had a similar experience when you suddenly felt sick in the stomach and had a bad premonition about the future, like a harbinger of misfortune?

...It seemed like I was the only one who was perturbed by Oubeniel's attitude during the practical. I myself, reassessed my trivial assumptions and shortly after, treated him as a mere friend.

During the course, he was by no means a popular person, but he had a large group of friends. Besides, it seemed that he proactively interacted with students and lecturers

of different courses too. Don't people consider alchemy as a more insular subject compared to other courses? Procuring things like medicine and experiment equipment that were required for magic research were mainly the job of the alchemy teachers. In contrast to other magic teachers, they were treated more like some contracted utility man. Even under the best of circumstances, we would be considered a rung lower than others, and despite so, Oubeniel went against those preconceptions and gained a reputation for being quite a misfit.

Yes, that is true. Normally, being so proactive in entering social circles would earn you favourable remarks from the rest, right? He was a competent alchemist and appeared to be a gentle person, so all the more so. But, he did not have a person to particularly call a friend. He was always with someone, smiling affably and if you have something to ask of him, he would generally help in the capacity of an alchemist. So why was he unable to have friends, or unable to make friends? It was a mystery.

Putting some thought into it, it did look like the wiles of a merchant. Approach people with a calming smile, flatter the other party's strong points and provide what they need. Most probably, that was what he sought out to do. He wasn't out to make friendships, and wanted acquaintances instead. Building the foundations for connections. So as to make small progresses in the preliminary preparation, that he cannot personally do, for his next research...

Have you heard about this from Professor Glauman? His most notorious research. Yes, that devilish experiment to artificially induce madness in people and then kill them to examine their souls. He brought a necromancer to his side for this sake, didn't he? Similarly, he sought the help of many others in different fields to help in his research. He must have established connections with others for this very purpose. In order to maintain a business partner kind of relationship, he avoided personally interacting with people, while not failing to make courtesy calls whenever the situation called for it.

Seriously, he pulled it off so well. Because of him continuously performing those experiments that makes one's head spin just by hearing about it, the voices which spoke well of Oubeniel disappeared in the blink of an eye. Even I would once again be reminded of the unpleasantness during the dissection practical. Still, in no way did the students rebuff their transactions with him. Sometimes the teachers too would have dealings with him. Just by giving him some help, they were able to receive a greater compensation in terms of effort. From valuable secret medicines to handmade equipment, he could offer help in almost anything. Sometimes he would even make

use of slaves with few abilities. If research was the deed of a devil, (these) people were all making a deal with the devil. It would be different if these people were experienced people, but the people here were mostly young students and researchers with little experience in society. Brushing aside and ignoring sweet temptations was too much of a load for them.

The slaves? It seemed like he was procuring them from the city's market. After feeding them some questionable medicine and doing some operations on them to strengthen them, he assigned them to the parties who had dealings with him. It was just annoying, though not considered an illegal action. The owner is free to do anything to their slaves. It is the same in any other country. Even if the person was tinkering with the slave's body with alchemy and selling the slave to other people. Though you can be exposed with a crime if you are caught under the possession of dangerous living things like a chimera, golem or homunculus. A magnificent loophole in the law. I would be surprised if anyone says how could he have done something so despicable.

Nevertheless, in the end, with that as the basis, he was chased out of the academy, so he wasn't something the world can accept.

The reason Oubeniel was expelled from school? Ahh, was that what you wanted to know the most? Have you heard the rough details from the Professor? Then it looks like our conversation will end fast.

It happened as soon as he became a second year student. If I remember, Oubeniel temporarily return to his country because his father was gravely ill, and it happened shortly after he came back to the academy. It was during a lively period, when the academy was welcoming the freshmen. He was also quite sensational among the freshmen. Though his dealings were not illegal, they were plenty shady. It wasn't something that people would discuss out loud, but still, it wasn't enough to shut their mouths completely. Students who had some connections with him talked about him to the juniors. Maybe they were proud about the goods they got from him, or there were trying to startle them with his affairs instead of a ghost story, or perhaps, they were pretending to be nice and was telling them who was the boss behind the school. All of these were possibilities.

Then there was this one freshmen who became interested in the rumours of Oubeniel. If he was the one paying for it, he could purchase top quality slaves inexpensively. I suppose that was what the freshman thought. Yes, that's right. It might be vulgar, but, he thought he can have that slave to, umm... to serve as an outlet for a gentleman's

desires.

People who knew about him could tell that it was an absurd rumour. Oubeniel was a guy that was undeniably more of a merchant rather than a mage. But, due to that, there were severe loss and gains for him. To people who gave him little, he would reciprocate with equally as few. In the first place, the slaves he managed were mainly for protecting him or labour.... Well, if he was given a request, it wasn't like he would definitely reject, but, for **that** kind of slave, they shouldn't be worth that much in terms of price, that was what I heard he had said. No matter how he went about it though, he probably wouldn't be able to get his desired result.

Of course, negotiations were quickly cut off. That young man was an aristocrat of this country, and was also in the family that had significant clout in the directorship of the academy. Therefore, he should have been able to afford it even if the price was slightly beyond what is reasonable. Still, he was certain that he could get that fine slave cheaply. Well, if he could be of assistance to Oubeniel's research, he might have been able to get her for cheap or even for free. Though for a freshman that had only entered school just a few weeks ago, it might be an impossible task.

If he had backed down then, the incident should have ended there. However, the youth caught sight of the slave there. Not just simply a target for his lust, it was something he wanted to get his hands on, no matter the cost. Yes, Yuni-san — Oubeniel's attendant maid.

She was quite famous within the school. She was a beautiful person, even from how I see it. She had an orderly appearance and behaved with impeccable gracefulness. Her lack of smile and silence was grating, but the way she privately snuggled to her master and devotedly attended him, it would be no exaggeration to call her the ideal servant.... I hear that she had served as Oubeniel's slave since she was a child, but his parents must have pampered him too much. That was because, no matter in which department, in looks, etiquette and her magic aura, all of them were first class. I can only believe that his parents were bedazzled by his cuteness and spent a fortune to get him the best slave and also provided his slave with training.

Well, since she was involved with Oubeniel, there were quite a few astounding rumours related to her. For example, she was a homunculus made by Oubeniel or that she was a flesh golem put together by choosing the best part from the people he killed... I cannot help but laugh at these rumours. Even if he concealed the unique aura of such a magical beast, he would be in a fix if somebody uses perception magic.

Actually, I have never seen that masterpiece of his. Surely there will be many people who will be fooled into thinking that it was a real human if he placed an emphasis on her appearance, but still, if a spell was used he would be troubled if she indeed a magical beast.

Ah, I went off topic. Now then, about the freshman in question.

The first time he set his eyes on Yuni-san, he fell completely head over heels for her. I heard he saw the silver collar, which represents her social status as a slave, and clean forgotten about the failed negotiations earlier. So he hounded him to give her to him.

— Please, give her to me, I will definitely not be rough on her, if she so wishes, I can free her from her position as a slave. I'm serious.

Well really, this was when he had just previously asked him to sell the girl slave at a cheap price. Nevertheless, if it was love, then maybe it was possible. Sweeping away all embarrassment and honour, the past and the future, all he could see was her. In that case, this emotion of his was something that couldn't be made fun of.

However, Oubeniel declined bluntly. He had raised his demands during the negotiations earlier and if he could fulfill his demands then he might respond to it, but this time, he gave no chance at it. I will never sell her. That was Oubeniel's reply. I hear even Professor Glauman who supports Oubeniel harboured an interest in Yuni-san too, but even if he was a Professor whom he was gratuitous to, he wouldn't even let him touch her. Not to mention an underclassman whom he just met; there was no way he was gonna agree.

The youth became frenzied at Oubeniel's reply. That his request — grounded in his subjectivity — was being taken advantage of, moreover, his affection towards her and his desire for this beautiful female slave to wait upon him was brushed aside without any care. In his eyes, he must have been a demon lord keeping captive of a princess. This is completely irrational but I must agree that Oubeniel was a scoundrel. In any case, the youth lost himself in anger and struck Oubeniel with magic all of a sudden.

But, the attack didn't land on Oubeniel. Yuni protected him. She did not merely possess magic, she was also superior in her usage of magic. The youth's magic was promptly blocked by a barrier and it can be said that his clothing were not ruffled one bit.

The one finding it unbearable was the youth. Not only did he rudely attack an

upperclassman by surprise, the one whom he had fallen for at first sight had protected him. You could say everything was going wrong for him and I kinda feel sad for him.

The youth flew into a rage and shouted.

— Cowardly! To have a female act as your shield!

He said.

He was the one who picked the fight so what the heck was trying to... Are you thinking about something along those lines? Though, well, what is it? If he didn't say that he wouldn't be able to live with his head up? Even if, for an instant, the surprise attack was targeted towards his upperclassman, it landed towards his loved one. And having his painstaking request thrust aside, the attack he launched didn't even reach him. I considered what he said to be some sort of a scream containing his feelings of guilt and humiliation. Though I am not keen to defend him any further than this.

By the time he realised, the area was filled with quite a lot of people. The place of this private talk was at the dormitory, in Oubeniel's room after all. It was natural for the boarders to check out the commotion. Despite being in plain sight by all those people, he didn't pay them any attention and raised his voice at Oubeniel, denouncing him.

According to him, Oubeniel was a nefarious student freely strewing kickbacks in school. He was a demon who conducted immoral experiments repeatedly. He was a sex maniac who forcibly made a girl become his slave and raped her... Well, there were some truths blended into it, but these three lines were, when I think back on it, things I wanted to say so myself.

The prevailing mood in the surroundings soon became tainted with a colour that made out Oubeniel to be the bad guy. Of course, I agree totally. The fault in this incident lies entirely on the side of the youth but, that does not write off the evil deeds Oubeniel has committed. There wasn't nobody supporting Oubeniel, but they stopped at no more than a few of them. Many of the students who benefited from him were afraid of being associated with his crimes. Good grief, since all of them were keeping up with appearances when they were with him, I thought it would turn out like that. Furthermore, the people whom Oubeniel lent his hand to were mainly students from the same course who sat near his desk and a portion of the teachers who sought his help. Naturally, the group of people who didn't receive anything from him — most of them held animosity towards Oubeniel.

Someone from the crowd yelled.

— Duel!

— The freshie is challenging Oubeniel, that snake bastard, to a duel!

They badgered.

It was nothing like that, but from the perspective of the full house of onlookers, their confrontational pose couldn't be anything else other than a challenge to a duel. That was how some excited students misunderstood the situation.

The youth was caught up in the moment. From the loser who launched an attack on an upperclassman in indignation and yet had his attack parried by the girl he had fallen in love with, he swiftly took the stance of a hero who was taking on a great evil. Without delaying any further, he recovered the elegance of the son of an aristocrat and challenged Oubeniel to a duel.

— Given that I was just testing the waters and that she blocked it with a barrier, my earlier attack felt weak.

— Don't be naive and think that I will make such allowances for you in a 1v1 fight.

He added all those useless taunts in his dare. I wonder what he would have done if he started criticising him for having struck earlier before even challenging him. Though speaking, with such a large crowd, it was indeed difficult for the villain to make an escape. Being a person who dislikes annoying conflicts, he wasn't eager to have a duel at all. Additionally, if he tried to run away from the drunken mob, who knows what might happen. A large scale riot was possible. That must have been within his calculations. In any case, the person who responds to a duel has the smallest risk of being culpable. If not for that, his usual style was to avoid such a conclusion.

I forgot to mention, the academy forbids non-official duels. Fights between magicians, even if it was only a brief squabble between fellow students, there might be significant damages. It wouldn't be strange if there were casualties too. Therefore, severe punishments would be doled out to offenders, though hardly anyone ever broke this rule. The response from the teachers' side was slow too. Since Oubeniel distributed his items and new theories, the political balance within the school had been shaken...

Among the board of directors and the lecturers, there might be one or two of them who wanted to see Oubeniel beaten up, or even better, becoming a dead man from the duel. Otherwise, they could interrogate him and detain him. Have you ever considered that? Though these are all my speculations.

The location they decided to have the duel was at the plaza, in front of the dormitory. His opponent was the all notorious Oubeniel and if you gave him time, who knows what he'll do — that was his argument for having the duel right away. Some simplistic thinking he came up with on the spot.

By then, the commotion reached the female dormitory, so my friend and I rushed there. At that time, for some reason, I was given the role of controlling the uproar created by Oubeniel, hence, my friend dragged me there. When I heard about the chain of events, I was surprised. No denying that he was a wicked person, and even if I thought he would be abusing a trick or two to slip through the cracks in the legal system, I didn't think he would be implicated in such stupidity nor cause an incident like this where direct responsibility cannot be shirked away from. There was no way he could be done in by any cheap trick too. I felt a deep, dark pleasure in knowing that the time had finally come for that scoundrel to learn some rules. As the saying goes, Heaven's net has large meshes, but nothing escapes.

When I arrived, the duel had just started. The young freshman left an imposing impression on me. He was full of confidence. We alchemists are mostly weak in magic. From the very start, this wasn't a popular course since it doesn't ensure a promising career. Consequently, the number of people studying alchemy was decreasing yearly. On one side, it was an aristocrat youth who was enrolled in the popular, military magic course. Using combat magic on the battlefield was the most common ideal in which magicians were raised to become. A natural-born in fighting. No way would he fall behind to something like an unprepared alchemist.

On the other side, Oubeniel was looking the same as ever. Yes, there was an air of tranquility around him. The look in his eyes were the same as normal. Those were the eyes he makes when it was business as usual, be it attending lectures, having a friendly conversation with friends, enjoying a book, ascertaining the chopping of a corpse or slicing the head of a living human. The only time the colour in his eyes change was when the results, regardless of it being a success or failure, of his experiments are out, or when he conceptualises a new experiment. Else, it would be when he received quality materials or quality equipment. The youth probably amounted to nothing but a pebble by the roadside in his eyes at best. In short, this means that he deemed us,

the people whom he interacted with daily, akin to something like that too.

Meanwhile, the duel began. It was a traditional duel where both parties were accompanied with one observer each. The observer from the youth's side made some assertive remarks but I can't remember what he said. That was because I was more interested in the identity of Oubeniel's observer. Though it was implicit, Yuni-san would have a problem in terms of social position, won't she? Adhering to the formalities, she would have no choice but to refrain from becoming an observer. In that case, who would stand in as his ally, I wondered. The observer from Oubeniel side was the student in the necromancy course who participated in the previously mentioned experiment. **That** crazy experiment, that is. Since we all know he had shown support to him in that incident, he can't say he had nothing to do with him now. How pitiable.

The outcome of the duel, you must have heard from the lecturer, haven't you? Oubeniel won. The youth who challenged him was seriously injured. How did the battle progress, you ask? I don't really want to say much about it, but if you insist on asking, I guess I can't say no...

Although I don't want to explain what happened, it wasn't that complicated a story. You see, Oubeniel wears a handmade defensive equipment with him even during normal occasions. And you might think he makes a killing by distributing them but, he simply stockpiles them to the extent where he literally has more than enough to sell. The amulet in his bosom was just the beginning of his set of equipment. He also wore a mantle, which serves as the school uniform, with a protection seal embroidered on the back of it. The mantle was woven with a silver thread which holds the power to repel monsters. In addition, he wore shoes infused with magic, allowing him to run quickly.... It was as if he was a moving fortress, or a walking equipment market. Some might think he was fighting some war with a country if he was seen with the full set under ordinary circumstances. If he had that much spare time to manufacture all that equipment while conducting his experiments, I don't really want to admit it, but this guy can definitely be called a matchless prodigy.

Of course, with an opponent fortified this much, there was no way the freshman's magic could pierce through his defences. Fire arrows, wind blades and lightning whips, none of them had any effect.... There was no need for Yuni-san to step in and protect such an invulnerable beast, I reckon. The youth must have gotten wrong idea that he could win him alone because she thoughtlessly defended him then. If that was the case, doesn't that make her a sinful woman?

Eh, he was cowardly? Yes, I think so myself. It's just that, I feel he is cowardly based on the fact that he prepared this much equipment for times of crisis. Did they not have any time to think about battle tactics? That is of course. The same applies for both of them; they dueled with whatever they had on them then. Moreover, the youth was the same in that he had equipment with him. The staff that magicians carry with them usually is an equipment that boosts their magic, isn't it? The things the youth had were also extravagant goods for aristocrats in high positions. If having equipment of a higher grade than normal people is a crime, then he was equally reprehensible.

...Sorry, I went offtrack again. Now for more details of their battle.

The battle progressed one-sidedly. His magic couldn't hit Oubeniel at all. No matter how desperately he launched attacks on him, the battle unfolded automatically as if approaching the limits of the laws of physics. He couldn't endure one bit of the magic that Oubeniel sent at him. He was beaten as Oubeniel freely willed. The outcome of the duel was clear as day.

Nevertheless, the youth did not give up. Honestly, he should have conceded. He refused to give up only because of his stubbornness. Furthermore, it was an obstinacy that was clearly wrong somewhere. Since he would be left with nothing if he conceded. Because it was a duel in which he staked his minuscule pride in, he didn't allow himself to quit.... He had the nature of one that lost big from gambling. There were some fights which shouldn't be picked and even if you did take on the fight, there were times when you should step down too.

Oubeniel gave a really fed up look that was unusual of him. I do believe that was the most human-like expression he has ever made. Next in line has got to be his cruel look when working on human experiments. He looked at him as though he was an insect. The face of someone who was annoyed by a fly that wouldn't stop flying around him no matter how he tries to shake it off. He had been going easy on him so as to make him surrender. Since that was the best way to resolve things amicably. Nevertheless, his opponent persisted on and all he could do was feel irritated.

In the end, the youth refused to admit defeat even though he was losing his consciousness and was in critical condition. Although Oubeniel won the match, not only did he break the rule of no personal fights, he showed immaturity in punishing his junior and was swiftly given the boot. If not for this incident, he might still be wiping out the slaves in Galerin by using them as materials for his human experiments.

The aftermath of the youth? He has since recovered. Originally, his serious injuries were treated with recovery magic but due to side-effects of this unnatural treatment, the bones of his limbs were crooked and it seemed that he had troubles moving them. Though, thanks to Professor Glauman surgery on him, somehow he was able to get back his body, good as new. Ironically, those surgical procedures were written on Oubeniel's thesis.

Oubeniel accepted the expulsion more readily than predicted. On the contrary, because of the uproar over the duel, Yuni-san seemed to have an unusually pale expression. Instead of him being expelled by the academy, it seemed more like he left after he was done playing with his toys. The budget for the alchemy course was rather limited, so it was quite possible that an alchemist working for a powerful aristocrat would own better facilities. Furthermore, it was immediately after his trip home due to his father being gravely ill. He could leave so gracefully because he thought he would be able to get the inheritance after his father passes away.

You are investigating on his family's succession, aren't you? Is his elder brother that much of a problem? Not particularly? It was because you heard from the rumours that he was a gifted child and yet, he willingly backed down? Now then, you should be able to resolve your doubts.

That guy was only engrossed in alchemy. And for alchemy, he was monster who could abandon anything and everything aside alchemy. He would rather avoid the disadvantageous obligations created from being the head of family, than enjoy the rights of one. I mean, government work and socialising both take up time and he wouldn't be able to work on his research.

Moreover, that guy who puts enough armour to be considered a fortress, probably did not forget to consider the dangers of pitting himself in a bloody battle with his brother. If ever he finds himself needing some political power to proceed in his research though, he would be in trouble.

...I was planning to make this short, yet we've talked for so long. This is also because Oubeniel, for better or for worse — my bad, for worse or for worse — is a man with an abundance of topics surrounding him. My thanks for keeping up this long with me.

Oh, right. May I add a last one?

This is just a conjecture of mine, but take it as an advice from me.

Presently, that guy is meekly allowing his brother to inherit the family while fully immersing himself in his favourite research, I think. However, he is definitely not satisfied with that and is definitely plotting something behind the shadows. After all, he is the monster who accomplished that blasphemous research and a person who would exhaust all means for his research, despite being just a lone student. As long as he hasn't stopped studying alchemy, he would sacrifice whatever he needs, to continue his groundbreaking research. He is quite capable of crushing one or two Earl Families, no, probably even countries too.

...Before that happens, that guy has to be killed as soon as possible.

You think I'm joking? I'm being serious.

This is what I observed from watching him for an entire year. I have thought about it...



End. At Sankt Gallen Federation: An inn in the Capital— Reflections of a Certain Court Investigator.

As I opened the door of the room I was allocated with, the scent of a flower I do not recognise wafted inside my nostrils.

The smell was overpowering and made my head dizzy. Was it some kind of a deodorant that cheap inns use? It's an awfully bad service for a customer paying this much money.

I laid down on the bed while feeling melancholy.

Using my leave and my private expenses, I came all the way to a neighbouring country for an investigation, and here I am, treated like this.

The succession of the Oubeniel Earl who passed on recently. It was predicted that a succession dispute would occur and so, since the second son quickly came down to a decision to withdraw from the succession, I personally became curious and put off the final conclusion into the matter until I finished investigations here. The little brother graciously handed over the seat of the head of family to his brother. It was excessively clean. I sensed something amiss and have come this far.

"Isn't this prodding the bush and frightening the snake...?"

The person in question, Talese Shernan Oubeniel is the Oubeniel's second son, and the more I learned about him, the more I find him a queer young man.

I heard that he started killing slaves deliberately since he was young.

He created a monster girl slave.

He intentionally induced madness in people and violated their souls after they died.

All of these are possible plots for a shoddy mystery novel. How am I supposed to report my findings? From the onset, this was an investigation that I insisted on doing myself. If I submitted such a report to the higher-ups, what would they say? I might be rebuked for needlessly getting to the bottom of a succession in which no problems surfaced. Had I known things would end up like this, I would have just collected the usual statements from the start to the end and closed this all of this faultlessly.

At this rate, I would leave a bad impression on the higher-ups and incur the displeasure of the next generation Earl Family Head who had his inauguration delayed.

And more importantly, this monster, Talese Oubeniel, what on earth is in his mind?

From what I have gathered of him, the manifold appalling incidents he has conducted has, quite staggeringly, completely been untouched by the law. Certainly slaves can be treated as and how the owner likes. They are free to inflict pain, torture, make them crazy and kill them. He came into contact with necromancers who have an extremely terrible image, but he requested help after going through the appropriate formalities and the necromancer requested belonged to a public institution dedicated to research. His dealings with students and lecturers couldn't really be called bribes. The only distinct violation was the duel, but it has already been internally dealt by Sankt Gallen. If this issue is brought up again, we would be infringing on the jurisdiction of Sankt Gallen and it might possibly become a diplomatic issue.

"Darn it, how did it end up like this..."

I feel like punching the me of a month ago, when I was self-confidently voicing dissent on the succession which was easily concluded.

Back then, a friend who joined the court around the same time as I did, advised me

strongly to drop this case. He must have heard a few rumours here and there about Oubeniel's second son and knew more than I did.

To think that this investigation which stemmed from my trivial unease over the matter, could sow the seeds for this disaster!

No way can we allow such a dangerous character roam around freely. Nevertheless, it is impossible for me to corner Talese Oubeniel with the plans I can come up with. At the very most, the rumours I can stir about him can only scratch him. And having opposed him, what kind of response he would take is still unknown.

I think the least I can do is to report that the girl is possessed by a demon. Preferably the church takes my advice and burn the girl on stake. However, his deceased father did try to bring him to the church and they didn't think anything was wrong with him. It seems that claiming that she is possessed would yield the same result, unless we dare to bear the crime of bribery and buy the pastor over.

What should be the best course of action?

Whichever angle I think from, I can't think of a strategy against him.

A sense of powerlessness and futility washed over my body.

...I feel overwhelmed.

Even though my consciousness is still here, I still feel my mind heading towards a direction of endlessness, as if my thinking cannot settle down.

I am so sleepy that I feel as giddy as I would be after pulling an all-nighter for work, but my nerves are fully dominated by nervousness and I totally cannot sleep. My situation was something like that. I could only rest my eyes meaninglessly at the ceiling of the room.

“.....”

Furthermore, there was an unpleasant aura in this place.

My nose was still unused to the scent that assaulted my olfactory senses when I first entered the room. The sweet flower smell was thick enough to penetrate through my

nose to my brains.

My brains, are, going, numb...

“—Yo, good evening.”

The door opened abruptly and a voice flew over.

The person stepping into my room rudely was a young man that shouldn't have yet reached the age of twenty. He wore well-made garments. An aristocrat? And yet he was such an impolite guest. He was paying a visit and yet he didn't even give a single knock before ent... no, wait.

Shouldn't the door be locked?

“Wh—”

As I was about to ask who he was, the young man seized me.

“Ah, don't mind me. Please relax as you are. Aren't you tired?”

The soft voice slipped into my ears readily. Just like how the smell enshrouding the room engulfed my nose.

All my tension came loose. I stopped trying to jump off my bed and repositioned myself again.

That's right, I shall do as he says. I am so tired anyways, and I don't wanna think about anything. I don't want to care about anything.

“Actually, I have some things I would like to ask of you. They are yes and no questions so you can just nod or shake your head to reply. I just want to hear honest and frank answers. You understand?”

I nodded.

“Splendid. Now then, let me ask. You are from the Alcael Kingdom's High Court, yes?”

I nodded.

“Your job, this time round, is to investigate the Earl Family succession?”

I nodded.

“Can you allow me to read the investigation record?”

I hesitated.

I have the responsibility to keep the investigation confidential.

“.....Shall I phrase that again? Where is the investigation record? You may simply point your finger at it.”

I pointed at the bag laid by the side of the bed.

I looked behind the man. There was a silhouette that seem to belong to a girl there. I believe she was wearing a set of maid uniform.

...Maid?

“Do not be concerned with her. Please only think about what I ask you. Is that understood?”

I nodded.

From where I pointed, the shadow of a person went towards my bag, soundlessly opened it and retrieved the bundle of parchment inside. And then, she respectfully got down on her knees and presented it to the man.

“Hmph... let me see—”

The man swiftly skimmed through the records.

I did nothing. My mind became dim. The only sound in the room was the monotonous rustling of page flipping. Saliva gathered in my mouth. Swallowing was too troublesome.

Eventually, the man finished reading the records and lifted his face while sighing.

“Really, this investigation report contains some brutal content huh. Don’t you think

so?"

I nodded. In that instant, I felt a drool drooping from the corners of my mouth.

"You are seriously one diligent investigator. You think yourself as one, don't you?"

I nodded.

I felt like dozing off in my blankets. I could accept all these praises while in that kind of state.

"If that is how you are, can you believe such a preposterous content from the investigation?"

.....I nodded.

I hesitated due to the outrageousness of the testimonies, but I am a High Court investigator.

I have faith in my investigations.

"Oh, so the bottleneck is the trust you have towards your investigation.... Well, when you first heard about this, didn't you have doubts?"

I nodded.

"Right — so, however slight it may be, you do think that it all sounds like a lie right?"

I nodded.

"Perhaps, the people who provided their testimony were all lying to you? Have you considered that?"

I nodded.

He smiled.

"Doesn't that mean you have no faith in their testimonies at all?"

I nodded.

He smiled.

"There is room for doubt?"

I nodded.

“Even if you talked to them, you don’t have enough confidence to believe?”

I nodded.

“You doubt the testimonies’ authenticity?”

I nodded.

“In that case — you can’t possibly use these testimonies in the report can you?”

M-m-m-m-me?

C-c-ca-can I...?

...I nodded.

His smile widened.

“.....Then, such a report is as good as trash isn’t it?”

I nodded.

“Then please burn them all when you wake up tomorrow morning.”

I nodded.

“Just send a report with ordinary information to the High Court.”

I nodded.

“Excellent. Now then, it is about time for me to go. Yes, the minute we go out and close the door, you shall sober up. At that point of time, you will forget ever seeing us, but please make sure to do what I asked of you, okay?”

I nodded.

After confirming that I agreed, the other person — for some reason, I cannot grasp her appearance — retrieved the incense burner placed in the corner of the room.

As soon as she did that, the sweet smell thickened.

That was where the scent was from...?
The someone who picked it up, blew away the flames.

The sweet scent faded —

“Farewell. Please do keep your promise.”

They left.
The door closed shut.
I was nodding.



My consciousness returned.
Somehow, it feels like I had dozed off. It must have been because of the long journey, I guess.

I shook my head and dispersed the sleepiness. Then I reached for the report in my bag, which was placed back where it was, and reevaluated it.

Because there was some points about it that bothered me. I am a thorough and hardworking investigator. I came all the way to gather evidence using my own expenses. I cannot make allow things that bother me to be in the report without confirming it.

“Damn, what is wrong with me...!”

Involuntarily, I scratched my head as I cursed out loud. Looking through once more, I understood.

Why didn't I notice earlier? This report is —

“Isn't this completely bullshit...!”

Some tall tale about alchemists that a drunkard would mumble about or what a receptionist who is left on the shelf would gossip about.

Furthermore, the content leaves me with nothing but a vulgar and horrid taste.

If I submitted something like this, there is no way I won't become a laughingstock.

"I have no choice but to rewrite the entire thing... no choice, I have to falsify the documents —"

I have to fabricate an appropriate and harmless report.

After all, there won't be anyone in the High Court who will be interested in the background checks of each and every second son among the aristocrats. Let's end it by following the flow and making do with a trivial trial. The young me was too indignant, asked to investigate on the succession and this was the result. I might be looked down upon by the boss, incur the displeasure of the new head of Earl Family and be ridiculed by my colleagues, but I should could myself lucky for getting a discount over it.

At the very least, it is better than submissively handing over this waste paper.

".....When daybreak comes, I shall discard it. No, I'd rather burn it personally."

Having made my resolve, I laid down on bed again.

Time to sleep.

When I wake up, I will burn up the nonsensical report and quickly return back to my country.

Luckily, I still have some days of leave leftover from those that I took for this dumb investigation. At least I have enough time to invent some normal-looking report...

The smell continued to linger faintly in the room.



PBFF by: traktorA7EN